

## KOJIKI

(“RECORDS OF ANCIENT TIMES”)

FROM BOOK I

THE AGE OF THE GODS

The names of the deities that were born in the Plain of High Heaven when Heaven and Earth began were the deity Master of the Center of Heaven, next the High Producing Wondrous Deity, next the Divine Producing Wondrous Deity. These three deities were all deities born alone, and they hid their persons [i.e., died]. The earth was young and like floating oil, and as it drifted about like a jellyfish something sprouted up like a reed shoot. The names of the deities that were born from it were the Pleasant Reed Shoot Deity, followed by the Heavenly Eternally Standing Deity. These two deities were likewise born alone, and they hid their persons. The five deities in the above list are separate heavenly deities.

The names of the deities that were born next were the Earthly Eternally Standing Deity, and then the Luxuriant Integrating Master Deity. These two deities were likewise deities born alone, and they hid their persons. The names of the deities that were born next were the Mud Earth Lord, next his younger sister the Mud Earth Lady; next the Seed Deity, next his younger sister the Life Integrating Deity, next the deity Elder of the Great Place, next his younger sister the deity Elder Lady of the Great Place, next the deity Perfect Exterior, next his younger sister the deity Venerable Lady; next the deity Izanagi (“Male Who Invites”), next his younger sister Izanami (“Female Who Invites”).

From the Earthly Eternally Standing Deity down to the deity Izanami in the preceding list are what is termed the Seven Divine Generations.

Hereupon all the heavenly deities commanded the two deities Izanami and Izanagi to form and consolidate this drifting land and gave them a heavenly jewelled spear. So the two deities, standing upon

the Floating Bridge of Heaven, pushed down the jewelled spear and stirred with it. They stirred the brine until it curdled, and then they drew the spear up. The brine that dripped down from the end of the spear piled up and became an island. This is the Island of Onogoro ("Self-Curdling").

The two deities descended from Heaven onto this island, set up a pillar, and erected a great hall. Izanagi asked Izanami, "How is your body formed?" Izanami replied: "My body is perfectly formed, except for one place where it does not come together." Thereupon Izanagi said, "My body is perfectly formed, except for one place where there is an excess. I would like to fill up the part of your body which does not come together with the part of my body which is excessive and thereby cause the lands to be born. Are you willing?" "Yes, I am," replied Izanami. "Then let you and me go around this sacred pillar and meet, and thus be married," said Izanagi. She agreed, and so he said, "You go around from the right, and I will go around from the left." When they had plighted their troth and gone around the pillar, Izanami spoke first: "Oh, what a fine man!" Then Izanagi said, "Oh, what a fine woman!"

Izanagi said to Izanami, "It was not right for a woman to have spoken first." Izanami repaired to her bedchamber and gave birth to a leech-child [a child without bones]. This child they placed in a boat of reeds and let float away. Next they gave birth to the Island of Awa; this likewise is not reckoned among their children.

The two deities now consulted together: "The children to whom we have thus far given birth are defective. We must announce this to the heavenly deities." They went up to Heaven together and enquired of the heavenly deities. The heavenly deities had a divination carried out, and said to them: "The children were defective because the woman spoke first. Descend again and amend your words." So they went back down, and they went round the pillar as they had before. This time Izanagi spoke first: "Oh, what a fine woman!" Afterwards his younger sister Izanami spoke: "Oh, what a fine man!" When they were done speaking they coupled and gave birth to a child, the Island of Awaji. Next they gave birth to the Island of Futana ("Two Names") in Iyo. . . . Then they gave birth to the Islands of Mitsugo ("Three Children"). . . . Then they gave birth to the Island of Tsukushi. . . . Then they gave birth to the Island of Iki ("One Pillar"). . . . Then they gave birth to the Island of Tsu. . . . Then they gave birth to the Island of Sado. Next they gave birth to Great Yamato the Islands of Rich Harvests. . . . The name "Land of the Eight Great Islands" originated in the fact that these eight islands were born first. [Yamato, Akitsushima ("Islands of Rich Harvests") and "Country of the Eight Islands" are poetic names

for Japan. Yamato can also refer specifically to the region of modern Nara.]

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When they had finished giving birth to countries, they began giving birth to deities anew. . . . First they gave birth to the deity Princess of Great Food. Next they gave birth to the Swift Burning Fire Deity. Through giving birth to this child, Izanami's private parts were burned, and she sickened and lay down and died. . . . [Eight more deities are born from her decaying body.]

Then Izanagi said, "Oh! my lovely younger sister! Oh! that I should have exchanged you for this single child!" [And yet another deity is born from his tears.] Then he buried Izanami on Mount Hiba at the boundary of the Land of Izumo and the Land of Hahaki.

Then Izanagi drew the great sword that was girded on him and cut off the head of his child, the Fire God. [Hereupon more deities are born from the blood that stuck to the point of his sword and spattered the rocks.]

Izanagi wanted to see his younger sister Izanami again, and he followed after her to the Land of Yomi [the Japanese land of the dead]. And when she opened the palace door and came out to meet him, Izanagi said, "My lovely younger sister! The lands that we have made are not yet finished; therefore you must come back!" Then Izanami answered: "Alas that you did not come sooner! I have eaten food from the ovens of Yomi. My lovely elder brother, you should not have come here. But I wish to return to the land of the living; let me briefly go talk with the deities who govern Yomi. Do not look at me!" and she went back inside the palace. She stayed away a very long time, and he became impatient. He took one of the end-teeth of the close-toothed comb stuck in the left bunch of his hair, lit one light, and went in. He saw maggots swarming all over her body. In her head was the Great Thunder, in her breast was the Fire Thunder, in her belly was the Black Thunder, in her private parts was the Cleaving Thunder, in her left hand was the Young Thunder, in her right hand was the Earth Thunder, in her left foot was the Rumbling Thunder, in her right foot was the Couchant Thunder; altogether eight Thunder deities had been born and dwelled there.

Izanagi was terrified, and he started to flee back to earth. Izanami said, "You have shamed me," and at once sent the deity She Who Defiles to pursue him. Izanagi took his black headdress [*kazura*] and cast it down, and it instantly turned into grapes [*ebikazura*]. While the deity picked them up and ate them he fled on; but when she still pursued him, he took the comb from the right bunch of his hair, broke it and

cast it down, and it instantly turned into bamboo sprouts. While she pulled them up and ate them, he fled on. Again, Izanami sent the eight thunder deities with a thousand five hundred warriors of Yomi to pursue him. He drew the great sword that was girded on him, and brandished it behind him as he fled forwards; and since they still pursued him, when he reached the foot of the rocky slope that leads from earth down to Yomi, he took three peaches that were growing there, and ambushed his pursuers with them, so that they all ran away. Then Izanagi announced to the peaches: "Since you have helped me, you must help all living people in the Land of Reed Plains [another poetic name for Japan] whenever they fall into trouble," and he bestowed on the peaches the designation of Great Fruit Divinity.

Last of all, Izanami herself came out in pursuit. So he drew a thousand-draught rock [i.e., a rock that would take a thousand men to move], and with it he blocked the road up the slope from Yomi; and they stood opposite one another with the rock in the middle and exchanged words of farewell. Izanami said, "My lovely elder brother! If you do things like this, I will in one day strangle to death a thousand of the folk of your land." Then Izanagi replied: "My lovely younger sister! If you do that, I will in one day set up a thousand five hundred huts in which women can give birth. In this manner each day a thousand people will surely die, but each day a thousand five hundred people will surely be born." This is the reason why, indeed, for the thousand people who inevitably die in a day, another thousand five hundred inevitably are born. And this explains why Izanami is called the Great Deity of Yomi. Again it is said that she is called the Great Deity Who Extends the Path because she pursued and caught up with her brother, and the rock with which he blocked up the pass of Yomi is called the Great Deity Who Turns Back the Path of Evil, and again it is called the Great Deity Who Blocks the Door of Yomi. . . .

Izanagi said, "I went to a hideous and polluted land, and so I will purify my body," and he went to the river-mouth near Tachibana in Himuka in the island of Tsukushi [modern Kyushu] and cleansed himself. [Various deities are born from his discarded garments and from the waters with which he washes himself. Finally, the deity Amaterasu ("Heaven Shining Deity," i.e. the sun goddess) is born from washing his right eye; Tsukuyomi (a moon god) is born from washing his left eye; and Susanowo, a turbulent deity of wind and storms, is born, appropriately, from washing his nose.]

And now, Izanagi rejoiced. He said, "I have begotten child after child, and at the end I have begotten three illustrious children." With these words he took off and shook the string of jewels that formed his

necklace and bestowed it on Amaterasu, commanding her: "Rule the Plain of High Heaven." With this charge he bestowed it on her. . . . Next he said to Tsukuyomi, "Rule the Land of the Night." Next he said to Susanowo, "Rule the Sea Plain."

Now while the other two deities assumed their respective rules according to their father's gracious command, Susanowo did not assume the rulership of his domain but cried and wept till his prodigious beard reached to the pit of his stomach. He wept so much that green mountains withered and all the rivers and seas dried up. On this account bad deities buzzed like the flies that swarm in the fifth month, and in all things there were portents of woe.

Then Izanagi said to Susanowo: "How is it that, instead of ruling the land which I put in your care, you wail and weep?" Susanowo replied: "I wail because I wish to go to my dead mother's land, to the Rocky Land Under the Earth." Izanagi became angry and said, "If that is so, you shall not dwell in this land," and at once expelled him. . . .

Susanowo then said, "Since you expel me, I will go say farewell to Amaterasu." With these words he went up to Heaven, and when he did so all the mountains and rivers shook, and everywhere the land quaked. Amaterasu heard and was alarmed, and she said, "My elder brother surely did not come here with good intentions, but rather because he wishes to rob me of my domain." Immediately, she unbound her hair and twisted it into bunches; and both into the left and into the right bunch, as similarly into her headdress and onto each of her arms, she twisted a long string of many curved jewels. She slung on her back a quiver holding a thousand arrows, and another holding five hundred arrows, and she also slung at her side a warrior's high sounding elbow-pad, and she brandished her bow. She stamped her feet into the hardened earth up to her thighs, kicking away the earth like rotten snow, and stamping challenged him loudly like a mighty man. "Why have you come up here?" she asked. Susanowo replied: "I intend no evil. But when the Great Deity [our father Izanagi] inquired why I was weeping and wailing, I said, 'I weep because I want to go to my mother's land.' And then he said, 'You may not dwell in this land,' and drove me out. I have come here only in order to tell you that I am going to join her. I intend nothing wrong." "But how am I to know that your intentions are sincere?" Amaterasu asked. Susanowo replied, "Let each of us swear an oath, and produce children."

Then they swore to each other from the opposite banks of the Tranquil River of Heaven. The names of the deities that were born from the mist of Amaterasu's breath were . . . [a long enumeration, beginning

with the Mist Goddess; followed by another, even longer enumeration of names of deities fathered by Susanowo].

Then Susanowo said to Amaterasu, "The proof that my heart is bright and pure is that I have fathered delicate females. Judging from this, I have undoubtedly gained the victory." And carried away with his victory, he broke down the divisions of the rice fields which Amaterasu had laid out, filled up the irrigation ditches, and as though that were not enough, strewed excrement in the sacred hall where she tasted the new rice. But though he did all of this, Amaterasu did not scold him. Instead she said, "What looks like excrement must be something that my elder brother has vomited through drunkenness. And the reason that he broke down the divisions of the rice fields and filled up the ditches must be that he thinks they occupy too much land." But despite these conciliatory words, Susanowo continued his evil acts, becoming more and more violent.

As Amaterasu sat in her weaving-hall overseeing the weaving of garments for the deities, Susanowo broke a hole in the roof beam of the weaving-hall, and through it let fall a piebald horse which he had flayed backwards. The women weaving the heavenly garments were so alarmed at the sight that they struck their shuttles into their private parts and died.

With that, Amaterasu was terrified; she opened the door of the heavenly rock cave, went in, and locked the door tight. Then the whole Plain of High Heaven became dark and all the Central Land of Reed Plains became dark, so that there was constant night. The voices of the deities filled the world like the flies that swarm in the fifth month, and all manner of evil arose.

And so the eight hundred myriad deities assembled in the bed of the Tranquil River of Heaven, and they had the deity Thought Possessor, child of the High Producing Wondrous Deity, think of a plan. They assembled long-singing birds of the world of immortality and made them sing. They took the hard rocks of Heaven from the river-bed of the Tranquil River of Heaven. They took the iron from the heavenly Metal-Mountains and called in the smith Amatsumara. They had the deity Old Woman Who Hardens Metal make a mirror, and the deity Jewel Ancestor make a complete string of curved jewels eight feet long, of five hundred jewels, and they summoned the deities Koyane and Futotama and had them pull out the shoulder blade of a stag from the heavenly Mount Kagu and take cherry-bark from the heavenly Mount Kagu, and perform a divination. They pulled up by its roots a *sakaki* tree with five hundred branches from the heavenly Mount Kagu and put upon its upper branches the complete string of five hundred curved

jewels eight feet long. They tied to the middle branches the great mirror. They hung upon its lower branches the white offerings of pacification and the blue offerings of pacification [probably different kinds of cloth]. The deity Futotama took these various things and held them as ritual offerings, and the deity Koyane recited powerful, wonder-working prayers. Meanwhile, the Hand Strength Male Deity stood hidden beside the door. The deity Uzume draped "shadevine" [clubmoss, a kind of fern] from the heavenly Mount Kagu around her arms and shoulders, made herself a headdress of leaves of the spindle-tree, and bound leaves of bamboo-grass from the heavenly Mount Kagu into an ornament for her hands to hold. She laid a sounding-board before the door of the heavenly rock cave, and drummed her feet on it until it resounded. As she became possessed, she pulled out the nipples of her breasts and pushed her skirt-string down to her private parts. Then the Plains of High Heaven shook, and the eight hundred myriad deities all laughed together.

The Heaven Shining Deity was astonished. She opened the door of the heavenly rock cave a crack and said from inside it, "I thought that when I secluded myself the Plain of Heaven would be dark, and the Reed-Plain Land too: why then does Uzume make merry and why are the eight hundred myriad deities all laughing?" Then Uzume said, "We are laughing with joy because there is a deity more illustrious than you." Koyane and Futotama pushed the mirror toward the Heaven Shining Deity so that she would see it. At this, she was even more astonished, and little by little she ventured from the doorway to peer into it, whereupon the Hand Strength Male Deity, who had been standing concealed, grasped her hand and pulled her out. Then the deity Futotama drew a rope behind her and said, "Go no further back than this!" And when the Heaven Shining Deity had come out, both the Plain of High Heaven and the Central Land of Reed Plains naturally became light again.

Then the eight hundred myriad deities consulted together and imposed on Susanowo a fine of a thousand tables full of food. They also cut his beard and had his fingernails and toenails pulled out. And then they expelled him.

[Susanowo begs the foodstuffs from an agricultural goddess. She gives him a variety of foods taken from her nose, mouth, and anus. Susanowo is enraged when he learns that the offering is defiled, and he kills her. From her body are born silkworms, grains, and beans. The High Producing Wondrous Deity (see the opening sentence of this selection) has them taken to be used as seeds.]

Now that he had been expelled, Susanowo went down to a place called Torikami at the headwaters of the River Hi in the Land of Izumo [part of modern Shimane Prefecture]. It happened just then that chopsticks came floating down the stream. Susanowo guessed that there must be people at the head of the river, and he went up in search of them. He came upon an old man and an old woman who had a young girl between them and were weeping. "Who are you?" he asked. The old man replied, "I am an earthly deity, child of the deity Great Mountain Possessor. I am called Foot Stroking Elder, my wife is called Hand Stroking Elder, and my only daughter is called Kushinada." Susanowo asked, "Why are you crying?" The old man replied, "I originally had eight daughters. But the eight-forked serpent of Koshi has come each year to devour one, and now is the time for it to come again." "What does the serpent look like?" Susanowo asked. The old man said: "Its eyes are as red as winter cherries; it has one body with eight heads and eight tails. Moss and hinoki trees and cryptomerias grow on its body. Its length extends over eight valleys and eight hills, and when you look at its belly you see that it is constantly running all over with blood."

Then Susanowo said to the old man: "This daughter of yours—will you give her to me?" The man replied, "With deep respect, sir, but I do not know your name." Susanowo said, "I am brother to Amaterasu, the Heaven Shining Deity, and I have just now come down from Heaven." Then the old man and woman said, "If that is so, with deep respect we will offer her to you."

Susanowo at once took the young girl and changed her into a comb which he stuck into his hair-bunch. He said to the deities Foot Stroking Elder and Hand Stroking Elder: "You must distill some refined liquor, distilling it eight times over. Also, you must put a fence around it, in that fence make eight gates, at each gate make eight platforms, on each platform put a liquor-vat, and into each vat pour the eight-fold refined liquor, and wait." Everything was done as he instructed, and they waited. The eight-forked serpent came, exactly as the old man had said, and right away lowered its heads into the vats, and drank up all the liquor. And now that it was drunk, it lay down and slept. Then Susanowo drew the great saber that was girded on him and cut and hacked the serpent to pieces, so that the River Hi changed into a river of blood. When he cut the middle tail, the blade of his sword was chipped. Astonished, he thrust in the tip and split the flesh. There inside he saw a great two-edged sword. He took this new great sword, and knowing it to be a marvel, respectfully told the Heaven Shining Deity and gave it to her. This is the sword Kusanagi ("Grass-Mower").

After this, Susanowo sought in the land of Izumo for a place where he might build a palace. He arrived at a place called Suga, where he said, "Now that I have come here my heart is refreshed [*sugasuga-shi*]," and there he built a palace to dwell in. That is why the place is even now called Suga. When this great deity first built the palace of Suga, clouds rose up from the ground. Then he made a song. That song said:

Eight clouds arise.  
The eight-fold fence of Izumo,  
To dwell with my wife  
I make an eight-fold fence;  
Oh, that eight-fold fence.

Then he called the deity Foot Stroking Elder and said, "I appoint you headman of my palace" and bestowed on him the name Master of the Temple of Inada, Many-Eared Deity of Suga.

[The story continues with the births of the children of his various wives, including the one he has just rescued from the serpent.]