

Amaterasu

Amaterasu (天照), **Amaterasu-ōmikami** (天照大神／天照大御神／天照皇大神), or **Ōhirume-no-muchi-no-kami** (大日靈貴神) is a deity of the Japanese myth cycle and also a major deity of the Shinto religion. She is seen as the goddess of the sun and the universe. The name Amaterasu is derived from Amateru and means "shining in heaven". The meaning of her whole name, Amaterasu-ōmikami, is "the great august *kami* (deity) who shines in the heaven".^[N 1] According to the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* in Japanese mythology, the Emperors of Japan are considered to be direct descendants of Amaterasu.



Amaterasu emerging from the cave, Ama-no-Iwato, to which she once retreated (painted by Kunisada)

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History

Records of the worship of Amaterasu are found from the c. 712 CE *Kojiki* and c. 720 CE *Nihon Shoki*, the oldest records of Japanese history. In Japanese mythology, Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun, is the sister of Susanoo, the god of storms and the sea, and of Tsukuyomi, the god of the moon. It was written that Amaterasu had painted the landscape with her siblings while she created ancient Japan.^[2] Amaterasu was said to have been created by the divine couple Izanagi and Izanami, who were themselves created by, or grew from, the originator of the Universe, Amenominakanushi^[3] All three deities were born from Izanagi when he was purifying himself upon entering Yomi, the underworld, after breaking the promise not to see dead Izanami and he was chased by her and Yakusan-no-ikaduchigami (八雷神), surrounding rotten Izanami. Amaterasu was born when Izanagi washed out his left eye, Tsukuyomi was born from the washing of the right eye, and Susanoo from the washing of the nose.

Amaterasu became the ruler of the sun and the heavens along with her brother, Tsukuyomi as the ruler of the night, and Susanoo as the ruler of the seas.^[4] Originally, Amaterasu shared the sky with Tsukuyomi, her husband and brother until, out of disgust, he killed the goddess of food, Uke Mochi, when she pulled "food from her rectum, nose, and mouth".^[5] This killing upset Amaterasu causing her to label Tsukuyomi an evil god and split away from him; separating night from day

The texts also tell of a long-standing rivalry between Amaterasu and her other brother, Susanoo. Susanoo is said to have insulted Amaterasu, claiming she had no power over the higher realm.^[6] When Izanagi ordered him to leave Heaven, he went to bid his sister



Amaterasu-ōmikami (天照大御神)

goodbye. Amaterasu was suspicious, but when Susanoo proposed a challenge to prove his sincerity, she accepted. Each of them took an object belonging to the other and from it, birthed deities. Amaterasu birthed three women from Susanoo's sword while he birthed five men from her necklace. Claiming the gods were hers because they were born of her necklace, and the goddesses were his, she decided that she had won the challenge, as his item produced women. After Susanoo's defeat he went on a rampage destroying much of the heavenly and earthly realm, Amaterasu's rice fields, hurled a flayed pony at her loom, and killing one of her attendants in a fit of rage. Amaterasu, who was in fury and grief, hid inside the Ama-no-Iwato ("heavenly rock cave"), plunging the earth into darkness and chaos. Eventually, she was persuaded to leave the cave. Initially, Omoikane threw a party outside of the Ama-no-Iwato to lure Amaterasu out but it was not until the Goddess Ame-no-Uzume danced promiscuously outside of the cave that Amaterasu came out.^[7] Susanoo was punished by being banished from heaven. Both later amended their conflict when Susanoo gave her the Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi sword as a reconciliation gift.

According to legend, Amaterasu, who was responsible from keeping balance and harmony within the earthly realm, bequeathed to her descendant Ninigi: the mirror, Yata no Kagami; the jewel, Yasakani no Magatama; and the sword, Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi. Collectively, the sacred mirror, jewel, and sword became the three Imperial Regalia of Japan

Worship

The Ise Shrine located in Ise, Mie Prefecture, Japan, houses the inner shrine, Naiku, dedicated to Amaterasu. Her sacred mirror, Yata no Kagami, is said to be kept at this shrine as one of the imperial regalia objects. A ceremony known as Shikinen Sengu is held every twenty years at this shrine to honor the many deities enshrined, which is formed by 125 shrines altogether. At that time, new shrine buildings are built at a location adjacent to the site first. After the transfer of the object of worship, new clothing and treasure and offering food to the goddess the old buildings are taken apart. The building materials taken apart are given to many other shrines and buildings to renovate. This practice is a part of the Shinto faith and has been practiced since the year 690, but is not only for Amaterasu but also for many other deities enshrined in Ise Shrine.



Amanoiwato Shrine(天岩戸神社)

The Amanoiwato Shrine(天岩戸神社) in Takachiho, Miyazaki Prefecture, Japan is dedicated to Amaterasu and sits above the gorge containing Ama-no-Iwato.

The worship of Amaterasu to the exclusion of other kami has been described as "the cult of the sun".^[8] This phrase may also refer to the early pre-archipelagoan worship of the sun.^[8]

See also

- Himiko
- Shinto in popular culture
- Sól
- Surya
- Vairocana
- Zalmoxis
- Ōkami Amaterasu, fictional character from video game Ōkami

Notes

1. *ama* means "heaven"; *tera* is an inflectional form of *teru*, "to shine"; *su* is an honorific auxiliary verb that shows respect for the actor; then, *amaterasu* means "to shine in the heaven"; *ō* means "big" or "great"; *mi* is a prefix for noble and august beings.^[1]

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天照

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Japanese

Etymology

From Old Japanese 天 (*ama*, “sky, the heavens”) + 照らす (*terasu*, “to illuminate something”).

Proper noun

天照 (*hiragana* あまてらす, *katakana* アマテラス, *rōmaji* Amaterasu)

- (*Japanese mythology, Shinto*) Amaterasu, the Japanese sun goddess
- (*poetic*) the Sun

Derived terms

- アマテラスオオミカミアマテラスオオ
 - 天照大神 (*Amaterasu Ōmikamī*), 天照大
ミカミ
御神 (*Amaterasu Ōmikamī*)

See also

- ツクヨミ
 - 月読 (*Tsukuyomi*)
スサノオ
 - 須佐之男 (*Susanoo*)
イザナギ
 - 伊邪那岐 (*Izanagi*)

Kanji in this term

天 照

あま
Grade: 1

て(らす)
Grade: 4

kun'yomi



The Sun goddess emerging out of a cave, bringing sunlight back to the universe

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