

大国主神 “O-kuni-nushi-no-kami”

### 3-2. 根の国訪問 “Visiting Ne-no-kata-su-kuni” (2)

When he arrived there, he met Suseri-bime, a daughter of Susa-no-o-no-mikoto. They exchanged glances and got married. She went back to her father and said to him, “An exquisitely handsome man has visited us.” Susa-no-o-no-mikoto himself went out to see him and said, “Oh, he is the man called Ashi-hara-shiko-o.” Then he told O-namuji to come inside and stay the night. But the room he was told to stay was full of snakes. Suseri-bime, his wife, seeing this, handed him a scarf to ward off snakes and said, “When the snakes try to attack you, wave this scarf three times. Then you can drive them away.” On that night he did as he was told, and then the snakes became calm and quiet. So he slept well and in the morning came out of the room. On the next night he was put in the room full of centipedes and bees, but he slept well again because he was given a scarf to ward them off and instructions from Suseri-bime as before.

At another time he was told to fetch a whistling arrow shot far into a field. But when he went into the field, he was surrounded by a fire set around the field. When he was at a loss how to get out, a mouse came up to him and said, “The inside is hollow, hollow, and the outside is thud, thud.” He accordingly stomped the ground, and then fell into a hole. The fire died down while he hid himself in the hole. Again the mouse appeared, holding the noisemaking arrow in its mouth, and gave it to him, though its feathers were nibbled by its children.

Meanwhile, his wife, Suseri-bime was weeping, carrying the equipment for her husband’s funeral. Her father, the great deity, assuming that he had died, came out on the field to confirm it. At that moment, O-namuji showed up before them and presented the arrow to Susa-no-o-no-mikoto.

Moreover Susa-no-o-no-mikoto called him into the very spacious hall and told him to get rid of lice<sup>1</sup> in his hair. When he looked into his hair, there were abundant centipedes there. For him to overcome the difficult task, his wife handed him berries of Muku tree and red clay. O-namuji chewed the berries and put the clay into his mouth and spat it out. The great deity, believing mistakenly O-namuji was chewing centipedes<sup>2</sup> and spitting them out to eradicate them, felt great affection toward him and fell asleep.

Notes | 注釈

#1 lice:

Nowadays most people, especially younger ones, don’t know lice or fleas. When I was a child, just after the WWII, they were around. We took that for granted. We used to crush fleas with our thumbnails and kill them. Then the blood they had sucked oozed out. Lice are a bit bigger than fleas and their bodies are white. They also suck blood. People used to kill them by chewing them in their mouths. But no one, as far as I know, died of such an insanitary practice, because we were tough. Anyway we should be familiar with such past practices to understand the scene.

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#2 centipedes:

I'd like to suggest that there is a textual error here. Shouldn't "centipedes" be replaced with "lice"? For, as we can see in the previous sentence, it was lice, not centipedes, that Susano-o ordered O-namuji to clear from his head. Besides, what O-namuji tried to do with berries and red clay has to be to pretend to kill lice. He chewed berries with a noise as if he was chewing lice, and the red clay must be a substitute for blood. Centipedes don't suck blood, and I'm afraid we can't spit out worms such as centipedes which are as big as about 10 cm in length.