

# KOREAN MYTHOLOGY (FOUNDING OF GOJOSEON)

In ancient times, the heavens were ruled by an Emperor by the name Hwanin. Hwanin had three sons; his third son went by the name of Hwanung.

Hwanung looked down upon the mortal realm with great anxiety; he feared that the humans had such an appetite for destruction and chaos that they may bring about their own extinction. He expressed his concerns to his father Hwanin, asking that he be sent forth to the human world to rule them as a benevolent king.

Hwanung sought to rule the humans in order to spread 'devotion to the welfare of humanity' or *Hongik Ingan*.

Hwanung, seeing his son's devotion to the humans, allowed him to descend from the heavens to the human realm and rule them in benevolence. To aid him with his quest, he gifted his son with three heavenly seals known as 'Cheonbu-samin', and a company of three thousand servants. He was also accompanied by the three lords of wind, rain and cloud, that he might be able to manipulate the climate of the

world to benefit all.

Hwanung descended to the earth, arriving at Mount Taebaek. On Mount Taebaek, Hwanung created the City of the Gods, which he called 'Shinshi'.

In the early days of his reign, Hwanung dealt with 360 issues which affected humanity. He created policies to improve agriculture, quality of life, justice and equality, and the treatment of disease and illness. He also addressed questions of ethicality, such as good and evil.

His benevolent rule over the humans became well known amongst the animals too, and soon Hwanung was approached by a tiger and a bear, who entered Shinshi hoping to become human. To test their devotion to humanity, Hwanung handed the tiger and the bear a handful of Mugwort along with twenty cloves of garlic. With this, they had to survive for one hundred days in a cave, devoid of sunlight.

The ordeal was harsh, and part of the way through the hundred days, the tiger fled the cave. The bear however remain in the cave, and after twenty one days, transformed into a woman by the name of Ungnyeo, or 'Bear-woman'.

After Ungnyeo was released from the cave, she found herself craving a child, and prayed beneath a Hangul ('divine birch tree') to Hwanung to grant her wish.

Hwanung was moved to tears by her pleas; temporarily taking human form in order to father a child with her.

Nine months later, Ungnyeo gave birth to a son whom she named Dangun Wanggeom.

Dangun grew up to become the forefather of the Korean people, creating a kingdom called Asadal; 'the land of the morning'.

Asadal became the capital of Gojoseon; and Dangun ruled for many years.

At the grand old age of 1,908, Dangun ascended to the heavens, taking his place amongst the Sanshinryeong, or 'Mountain gods'.

Q: At what age did Dangun ascend to the heavens?

A: 1,908 years old.

Q: Why did Hwanung test the tiger and the bear?

A: To see if they were worthy of becoming human

Q: What issues did Hwanung deal with?

A: Ethicality, agriculture, quality of life, justice and equality, the treatment of disease and illness, amongst others.