

## The Story of Tan'gun

Long, long ago, Hwanin, who ruled the heaven, had a son named Hwanung. Hwanung always looked down on earth from heaven. There were many beautiful mountains, rivers, and plains on earth. Among those mountains was one named T'aebaek.

Knowing that Hwanung wished to go down and rule the people, Hwanin decided to send his son to earth and said, "My son, I know that you have great plans for human beings on earth. Take these heavenly seals and go."

"Thank you, Father" said Hwanung to his heavenly father, "I will go there and enlighten the inhabitants of the earth and teach them how to live."

After this, Hwanung took three sacred seals and three thousand followers and left heaven for earth. He landed on the top of Mount T'aebaek where a sacred tree had stood. It was the place where the people on earth had worshiped heaven. Arriving there, he called the place the Divine City, and made it his base for the rule over human beings. He commanded the gods of wind, rain, and clouds, taught human beings how to grow food, healed the sick, and gave them 360 rules for orderly life.

While he was doing all these things, a bear and a tiger, who lived in a cave near the Divine City and wished to be human beings, came to Hwanung every day and begged him to make them human.

Eventually, Hwanung took pity on them and gave each of them a stalk of mugwort plant and twenty pieces of garlic. He then told them that if they ate the mugwort and garlic, and avoided the sunlight for one hundred days, they would become human.

The bear and the tiger ate only the mugwort plant and garlic and stayed in the cave. It was not easy for them to do so, though. In fact, the tiger could not withstand the hardship, and he went out of the cave after only a few days. The bear, however, patiently remained in the cave.

A surprising thing happened. On the one hundredth day the bear turned into a beautiful woman. She built a small hut on a quiet and beautiful spot and lived there peacefully. As the days passed she became lonely. Her loneliness increased to the point she could no longer endure it, so she went to see Hwanung again and begged earnestly, "Lord Hwanung, thank you for making me a human. Would you please find me a husband to keep me company?" Hearing this, Hwanung pitied her and changed his own form into a strong and handsome young man. After that, he made the young woman his wife, and they had a son named Tan'gun who became the ancestor of the Koreans. Tan'gun grew up strong, and in 2333 B.C., over 4,300 years ago, he established a new nation. This nation was the first kingdom to emerge on the Korean Peninsula, and its name was Choson. Tan'gun ruled over Choson for 1,500 years, and then became a mountain god at the age of 1,908.

-The End-