

Chapter 5: Mythic Volcano Spirits

THE BIG QUESTION How do volcano myths help explain volcanic activity?

Volcanoes are very powerful. They make loud noises and shake the ground. Long ago, some people thought there were strong spirits living inside volcanoes. They believed these spirits caused the eruptions. Some people thought that when a volcano was not making noise, it meant the spirits inside were happy. Others thought that when the volcano erupted, it meant the spirits were angry. To keep the spirits happy, people would leave them food, flowers, and animals.

People told stories to explain why unpredictable events like volcanoes happened. Many stories had volcano gods in them. These stories, called myths, were told many times. Over time, volcano myths became an important part of a culture's history and tradition. The myths were creative explanations for natural processes and events.

Hawaii's Goddess of Fire

Pele is the old Hawaiian goddess of fire and volcanoes. People think she made volcanic mountains and islands. When she makes hot lava come out, she also wrecks land and everything on it. People started believing in Pele a long time ago. Native Hawaiians think the goddess lives in Kilauea, an active volcano on the island of Hawaii in the Hawaiian Island chain. This Hawaiian volcano story tells how she started living there.

Long ago, there was a girl named Pele. She lived with her family in the spirit world. Pele was strong and got mad easily. When she got mad, she made things burn and hot lava come out of the ground. Pele was friends with most of her brothers and sisters, but she didn't get along with her sister Na-maka-o-kaha'i, who was the goddess of the ocean. They started to not like each other. Pele decided to look for a new home, so she sailed across the ocean with some of her brothers and her little sister, Hi'iaka.



Pele went to Kauai, an island in Hawaii. There, she met the king and they decided to get married. Before the wedding, Pele wanted to make a special home. She thought a big hole in the ground with hot lava would be perfect.

Pele had a special stick that could dig. When she put the stick in the ground, a big hole would open up and hot fires would come out. Pele started digging along the rocky coast of Kauai. Every time she made a hole, water from the sea would come in and put out the fires. Pele was very surprised to find out that her sister, Na-maka-o-kaha'i, had come to Kauai too. Na-maka-o-kaha'i was trying to mess up Pele's plans to make a house and get married.

Pele and her family went to different islands. Her sister tried to ruin her fun by filling her holes with water.

Finally, Pele got to Hawaii, the biggest island in the group. Pele went up the mountain named Kilauea and made a hole at its top. The shiny orange flames of volcanic fire glowed and stayed lit. Pele's hole on Kilauea was way up above the ocean, far from the ocean goddess.

Pele was happy with her new home. She asked Hi'iaka to bring her future husband from Kauai. She told her little sister to come back in less than 40 days. She also warned Hi'iaka not to fall in love with Lohi'au herself. In return, Hi'iaka made Pele promise to take care of a beautiful grove of trees that grew on Kilauea. Hi'iaka loved the trees. She was scared that if Pele got angry, she would send out rivers of lava to burn them.

Hi'iaka's trip took a lot longer than she thought. It took more than 40 days to go to Kauai and find Lohi'au. On the way back to Hawaii, Hi'iaka started to like Lohi'au more and more. She also started to get more and more scared of how Pele would feel about them being so late.



When Hi'iaka finally got to Kilauea with Lohi'au, she saw her beautiful forest was all gone. It was burned by Pele's fiery volcano. To make her big sister mad, Hi'iaka kissed Lohi'au. This made Pele really angry and she sent a big river of fire down the side of Kilauea. Lohi'au was buried under it.

Hi'iaka was mad and wanted to get back at Pele, so she dug into the side of the volcano. Then hot, melted rock started to come out and move toward the sea. One of Pele's brothers stopped Hi'iaka before all the hot rock went away. But a lot of it had already been lost, so the top of Kilauea fell. It made a big hole like a bowl at the top of the volcano, and you can still see it today.

Two of Pele's brothers helped Lohi'au, who was in danger. They brought him back to life and he married Hi'iaka, who truly loved him. They were

happy together while Pele stayed in her tall volcano home. Some people think Pele still lives in Kilauea. When the volcano erupts, they say it means she is getting angry again.

Princess Power

In 1880, a big volcano named Mauna Loa erupted. A lot of hot, red lava flowed down the mountain toward the city of Hilo. The Hawaiian princess, Ruth Keelikolani, went to see the lava as it got closer to the city. Princess Ruth stood right in the path of the moving lava. She sang old songs and gave gifts to Pele. The next day, the lava stopped flowing. This helped people keep believing in Pele.

The Origin of Crater Lake

The Klamath Indians tell a story about how Oregon's Crater Lake was made. This big, round lake is in the hole of an old, sleeping volcano called Mount Mazama. Mazama is one of many volcanoes in the Cascade Mountain Range. Scientists think that Mazama's hole was made when it exploded a long time ago, around 8,000 years ago. Rain and snow filled up the hole and made Crater Lake. The Klamath's story about Mazama's explosion and the lake's making is based on these things.



Long ago, there were two powerful Spirit Chiefs. Monadalkni was the Chief of the Below World and lived underground. Sahale Tyee was the Chief of the Above World and ruled from the ground to the sky. Mandakini went to the Above World. He climbed up a snowy mountain and came out at the top. He saw the forests, rivers, lakes, and the Klamath people's camps from up there.

One day, Monadalkni saw the chief's daughter, Loha. He thought she was very beautiful and wanted her to be his wife. He came down from the mountain and asked Loha to marry him, promising her eternal life. But Loha said no.

One of Monadalkni's servants from Below World came to ask Loha again. The servant brought many gifts and put them in front of Loha. He wanted to convince her to marry his master by promising her eternal life and living in the mountain forever. But Loha said no.

Loha ran to her father and asked for help. The leader of the Klamath people got the group together. They all agreed that Loha should try to hide from Monadalkni, so she did. Monadalkni was very mad when he found out that Loha had said no to him again. He raged inside his mountain, making it shake and rumble. He threw lightning bolts and spewed fireballs from his mouth.

The top of the mountain blew up, which sent hot lava and cloudy ash raining down on the land. The Klamath people waded into streams and lakes trying to get away from Monadalkni's fiery revenge. They cried out to Sahale Tyee for help.

Sahale Tyee helped his people by battling Monadalkni. After a fiery fight, he made Monadalkni go back into the mountain and blocked the entrance to the Below World. The Klamath elders prayed for rain which put out the volcanic fires. The rainwater filled the mountaintop and made Crater Lake.

