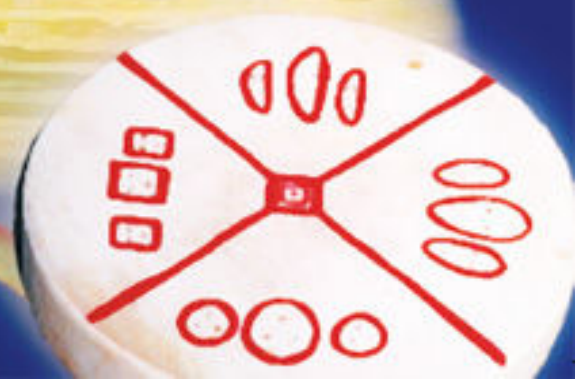


RIDING WINDHORSES

A Journey into the Heart
of Mongolian Shamanism

SARANGEREL



Riding Windhorses



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of Mongolian Shamanism

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Destiny Books
Rochester, Vermont

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my most heartfelt thanks to the many people who have helped me with the learning of the knowledge contained in this book and those who allowed me to use their equipment during its writing.

I would first like to thank the shamans Byambadorj Dondog, Tserendorjiin Sumiyaa, Sanjai Khoborkov, Valentin Khagdaev, and Dawaatseren, who adopted me as his daughter while I was in Mongolia.

Furthermore I would like to thank the people at Inform Polis and Buryaad Unen in Ulan Ude in Siberia, who allowed me to use their computers while I was writing this book, and the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who helped me with my research.

Most of all I would like to thank Bayar Dugarov, who has been my friend and companion on my path of learning. Without his inspiration and support this book would not have been possible!

Sarangerel

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Preface

The intent of this book is to acquaint the reader with the shamanic world of Siberia, especially from the perspective of the Mongols. In Siberia there are three groups of nationalities and tribes, the Uralic, the Altaic, and the Paleo-Siberian, and each of these groups contains smaller groups. In spite of some linguistic differences there are overarching themes and images that appear among all forms of shamanism in Siberia. This book will focus on the Altaic peoples' shamanism, especially that of the Mongols. Indeed, the classic studies of shamanism, including those by Marie Czaplicka, Mircea Eliade, and Michael Harner, have given special attention to the shamanism of Altaic peoples such as the Buryat, Mongols, and Tungus, creating an image of a "classic" Siberian shamanism. I am, therefore, treading in the same footsteps as some leading authorities on shamanism, yet I hope that I shall be able to add a new perspective on Siberian shamanism.

As I will be using the term "Altaic" several times during this book I will explain a little about its meaning. As mentioned above, there are three great groups of nationalities in Siberia, of which the Altaic peoples are one. The Altaic derive their name from the fact that most historians believe that these peoples originated in the region between the Altai Mountains in the west and Lake Baikal in the northeast. They share related languages, a mixed pastoral and hunting lifestyle, and share common shamanic traditions. These peoples include the Mongols, Tungus (Evenk), and the various Turkic peoples of Siberia such as the Tuvans, Tatars, Khakass, Yakut, and Altai (not to be confused with Altaic). Since the Altaic peoples share a common ethnic origin from ancient times, their similar shamanic traditions all spring from a common ancient source. The Mongols, whose shamanism belongs to the Altaic tradition, consist of various sub-groups within the greater Mongolian ethnos, including the Halh, Oirat, Buryat, Kalmyk, and Dagur, among others. Much of what is presented in this book comes from Buryat, Oirat, and Dagur Mongol shamanic traditions.



The author (right) and the shamaness Sumiyaa shamanizing in the Bumbat valley.

I myself am of Siberian descent through my mother's family, and I have practiced shamanism for many years. For the past five years I have been in daily contact with Mongols and Buryats in the United States, in Mongolia, and in Siberia. My experiences have allowed me to learn more about Mongolian shamanist beliefs and the customs that stem from the shamanist worldview. In years previous I studied under a Native American (Tsalagi) shamaness, Linda Luke, which gave me the opportunity to compare the ideas that Siberians and Native Americans have in common. I learned that there are striking similarities between the two traditions, a fact that may be attributable either to common ancestry and thus diffusion through migration across the Bering land bridge, or to the possibility of similar environments creating a similar set of beliefs. Exploring all the questions surrounding this phenomenon, however, would require yet another book.

Some readers may be familiar with other sources of information concerning various Mongolian and Siberian ethnic groups and may find that certain features of the Mongolian shamanism I describe here are not completely accurate in all points for all Mongolian or Siberian tribes. This is, of course, the result of the great geographic area and differences in

environment and tribal history that have allowed for variation in observances and beliefs. This book is meant to be a synthesis based on personal experience as well as on studies of the Mongols and several Siberian tribes that share common linguistic roots and similar traditions with the Mongols. It is my goal to present a model of Mongolian shamanism based on common themes and images found among most Mongolian communities and among other native Siberian nationalities related to the Mongols such as the Altai, Tuvans, Yakut, and Tungus. Since religion is by nature conservative, even though it may undergo dramatic changes in some of its aspects, it often retains at its core beliefs and images that are extremely ancient.

Many readers may be familiar with the worldview of Native Americans, and how their relationship with nature shaped their beliefs and behavior. This worldview is also found among Mongols and Siberian peoples in general. Reverence for Mother Earth and Father Heaven above, as well as for all the spirits of animals and nature, creates a way of life that expresses respect for natural forces and abstains from harm to them whenever possible.

Mongols believe that the goal of life is to live in a state of *tegsh*, in balance with the world. One stands alone and in power at the center of the world, with infinite blue Father Heaven above and Mother Earth supporting and nurturing below. By living an upright and respectful life, a human being (*hun*) will keep his world in balance and maximize his personal power (windhorse, *hiimori*). Heaven and Earth, the spirits of nature, and the ancestors supply every need and protect all humans. Shamans play an important role in restoring balance when it goes awry because of disaster or spirit interference.

The emphasis on personal power and harmony with the natural world are two elements that distinguish shamanism from other religions. In fact, to classify shamanism as a religion is inaccurate because it does not have a fixed doctrine or formal organization. It is very personalized because of its dependence on individual vision and relationship with the

world and higher powers. One Mongol described it by saying, “Everyone has his own universe, everyone has his own path.”¹

As we approach the third millennium of our era, we are faced with almost daily reminders of how we need to restore our connection with nature in order to preserve the world for future generations. We, as the human race, can look back at the centuries of misery and bloodshed caused by the conflicts connected with organized religions. While not every person may be inclined to subscribe to shamanist beliefs per se, the themes of retaining balance in the world and discovering religious belief through personal experience are important and applicable to the life path of almost anyone. For that reason, shamanism represents a type of relationship with the world and the spiritual dimension that is not only useful, but perhaps also necessary for the survival of humankind.

I have organized this book in a way that presents the basic concepts of Mongolian-Siberian shamanism in seven chapters. Each chapter concludes with a ritual or two that incorporates the knowledge conveyed in the chapter, thereby mixing the learning with practical methods that will allow one to experience the power and beauty of Mongolian shamanism. These rituals, while true to Mongolian and Siberian custom, have been scaled down somewhat for individual or small group use in Western countries. The truth and the core experience are retained, however, and by the time the reader has completed both the learning and practical sides of this book he or she will be able to follow the Siberian shaman path for enlightenment and personal growth. Therefore, I hope that all reading this book will profit from the knowledge of the shamanism of Siberia and Mongolia presented in the following pages.

unen zurhenees yoslov^{*1}



Western Mongolian shaman Byambadorj Dondog drumming at the summit of Bogd Uul, Mongolia.

Introduction

Mongolian Shamanism and World Culture

[Shamanism] is the best, most beautiful religion. Most balanced. Most bright, most free... . You know when you have been sitting in a Mongol [ger] about noon, reading in the shade, and then suddenly you open the door and step outside. What do you feel? Vast, bright ... The sky and the earth, they are balanced, you see.

—Urgunge Onon, from Humphrey and Onon,
Shamans and Elders



The thing most commonly associated with Buryat-Mongolian culture from a Westerner's standpoint is the tradition of shamanism. No book about shamanism fails to mention Buryat or other types of Mongolian shamanism. It is without a doubt one of the oldest religious and cultural traditions in the world. Buryats are a subset of the greater Mongolian nationality but many writers relying on secondary (or even tertiary) sources are unaware of this fact and refer to them as if they were a distinct or separate nationality. It is possible that readers of Eliade and other such authors will have read about the Buryats and never realized they are actually Mongols. I also use the term Buryat for brevity since "Buryat-Mongol" is rather cumbersome.

Why is shamanism so important to world culture? The simplest answer is that it espouses a view of the world that is vital to man's future survival. Perhaps better than almost any other peoples, Buryats and other Mongols have understood the importance of keeping the world in balance and honoring the air, waters, and land. Rather than seeing the world as inanimate, the traditional Mongolian point of view holds that it is vibrantly alive with spirits and souls in every thing and in every place, and that all animals and plants have sentient souls much like our own. Respect for the spirits of nature and living things has shaped a religion and life ethic that minimizes negative impact on the earth. This way of life is radically different from that of European cultures, which have considered most of the world to be lacking in sentience and useful only for exploitation.

This exploitative outlook is the root of all our current environmental problems, whether in Russia, the United States, or in other parts of the world where an essential connection to, and respect for, Mother Earth has been forgotten. Until humankind remembers this connection it will continue to endanger its own future. It is well known that pollution of the earth, air, and water is the biggest threat to human health today, and this problem will only become more severe unless we take a different course.

These words should not be construed as being antitechnological, but rather as a call for a reconsideration of how technology is used. Indeed, Buryats and other Mongols have not traditionally been opposed to technology; rather, they adapted their traditional lifestyle to technological changes yet still retained a balance with their own environment.

At the heart of Mongolian shamanism are three essential ideas:

1. the maintenance of balance in the world;
2. reverence for the earth and living things;
3. personal responsibility.

According to Mongolian shamanism, the ideal way to live is best described by the word *tegsh*, which means “being in balance,” and which implies acting in moderation but also with consideration for the effects of one’s actions upon others. For instance, one’s own personal power is directly related to one’s positive and negative actions, and although no human being is capable of only positive actions, as long as the positive and negative are in balance with each other one can live in health, peace, and safety. When one’s actions are too negative, one’s personal spiritual power becomes depleted, and one will be susceptible to disease and other dangers. In such cases a shaman would be called upon to restore balance. From a modern standpoint, the essential meaning of *tegsh* is to live temperately and conscientiously, keeping negative and positive actions in balance. While one has the intention of leading a good and benevolent life, one can accept one’s own flaws as well because balance, rather than absolute goodness or perfection, is the ideal.

Respect for the environment is most essential for our future survival. While not all people will share the traditional Mongolian view of the spiritual dimension of nature, nevertheless a reverence for the air, rivers, earth, forests, and mountains will transform the current attitude toward the environment that is at the root of all our current environmental problems. Mother Earth and Father Heaven have created us

and nurtured us for millions of years and deserve our respect. This principle also blends with the idea of balance in that Mongols and Siberian people in general have always used the resources around them in a way that is renewable, that is, with no permanent damage to the environment. These people have traditionally believed that if resources are taken without thanking the spirits for what the spirits have given, they will not return again. Presently, our challenge is to use renewable resources and alternative energy sources, to recycle, to use appropriate technology, and to otherwise apply the high technology we are developing so that we can create a sustainable lifestyle in the coming millennium that will approximate the balanced relationship with the environment that has been typical of Siberian cultures since the earliest recorded history.

Accepting personal responsibility is the third important aspect of Mongolian shamanist philosophy. This is often expressed in the Buryat expression "*tenger medne*," which means "Father Heaven knows." The ultimate relationship every person has is with Father Heaven; there are no holy books, no priests, and not even shamans can come between this basic relationship. This means that every person is responsible for his or her own actions, and Tenger (Father Heaven) sees all that is done and is the ultimate judge and shaper of destiny. While shamanism has long been misunderstood as being superstition, it is actually a very sophisticated form of religion. It is very free, and very modern. I say this because each individual, in seeking his or her own relationship with the Sacred, becomes personally responsible for what happens in his or her life, and is required to know his or her own self. Just as our modern global society is urging mankind toward a relationship among all peoples that transcends but yet honors individual differences, shamanism cultivates a way of life in which people honor all ways of approaching the Supernatural while each has his or her own approach toward doing so. Most people believe that there is a supernatural force, and many have their own names for it, but ultimately the relationship between a human being and the universe is personal.

This is the reason why Chinggis Khan^{*2} (Genghis Khan) in his time tolerated all religions within the great Mongolian Empire. In the past, and even now, the divisions between religions have been, and still are, the cause of war and suffering in many parts of the world. The inclusive view of the “barbarian” Chinggis Khan is a useful model for the future as our world becomes ever smaller and people must learn to live in brotherhood and peace.

I have the sincere hope that people will read this book with an open mind. In our modern age we face a challenge: we are in the midst of a communications revolution in which information about cultures and history can be spread rapidly, and Mongolian and other cultures may be understood better than in the past; but as our society becomes global all nations must live together in peace while preserving those truly unique and valuable aspects of their cultures that derive from their own ancient traditions. This is true for Russia, the United States, and the world in general. Therefore I want to do my small part in helping to preserve and promote the unique traditions of the Mongols and Siberian peoples for the future and for all people.

Chapter 1

Mongolian Cosmology

Tenger, humans, fire, and water, those [are] the elements. If we think about it, there is the vast arch of the sky, and the sun and moon, like Tenger's eyes. If we look, the sun is fire, the moon is water. In 50 years' time all of humanity will realize that clean air and pure water are the most important things in the world.

Urgunge Onon, from Humphrey and Onon,
Shamans and Elders



The universe of the Mongols can be visualized as a circle, not only in the three dimensions of space, but also in time. Everything has a circular motion: the path of the sun from day to day, the cycle of time from year to year, and the cycle of the spirits of all living beings that return to the earth to live again and again.

Intersecting the circle are the axes of the four directions and the axis of the center of the world, going up to the upper world beyond the eternal heavens and going down beyond Mother Earth to the lower world. Superimposed on this is the image of the universe as seen in the visions of shamanic journeys, in which the shaman can climb the World Tree or fly to the upper world, travel down the spirit river to the entrance to the lower world in the north, or simply find a tunnel in the earth through which to travel below.

The Four Directions (*Durvun Zug*)

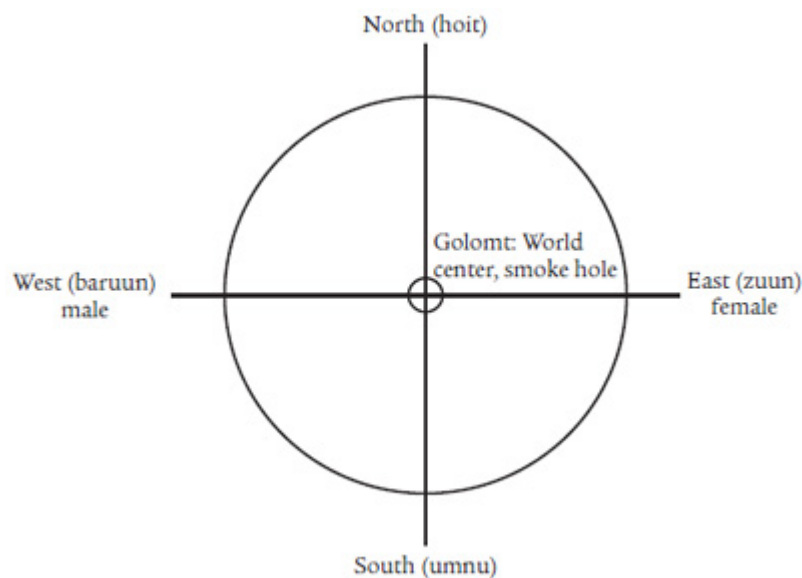
Awareness of the four directions is fundamental to the Mongolian view of the world. A few Mongolian friends have told me that if they are not aware of their orientation to the four directions at all times, they feel ill at ease. The names for the four directions correspond to the words for “front,” “back,” “left,” and “right.” Until about 600 or 700 years ago, the “front” orientation of the Mongols’ world was to the east, but for some unknown reason it shifted to the south, where it remains today. Many Siberian tribes still orient their dwellings to face east.

The Mongolian worldview looks from north to south. For this reason south is called the “front” (*umnu, urid*) direction. Correspondingly, north is called the “behind” (*hoit, ard*) in Mongolian. East and west are called “left” (*zuun*) and “right” (*baruun*), respectively. The right (western) side of the world is regarded as being male in essence, and it is the home of the benevolent sky spirits (*tenger*). The eastern, or left, side of the world is regarded as female, and the sky spirits of that direction are believed to bring disease and discord. There are four colors associated with the four directions: the south is red, the west is white, the north is black, and the east is blue. There

are also four essences associated with the four directions: south is fire, west is earth, north is water, and east is air.

The *Ger* and the Sacred Circle

The *ger*, known in the West as the yurt, is the traditional dwelling of the Mongols. It is constructed of a framework of poles (*uni*) radiating from a center smoke-hole ring (*tono*), which is lashed to the top of a circular latticework wall. The structure is covered over with felt in Mongolia, although the *gers* of some Siberian groups are covered with skins. In Buryatia and in some other areas an eight-sided wooden *ger* is made of logs with wood laid over the roof instead of felt. It bears a very strong resemblance to the hogan of the Navaho of the American Southwest. Also, many Siberian peoples, including the Tsatang and Urianhai Mongols, live in tepees. *Gers* and tepees (*uurts*) are designed to be easily assembled and taken down as required by the nomadic life of their owners; nevertheless, the imagery and meaning of the *ger* remain the same no matter where it is erected, and the orientation and symbolism of the *ger* is the same for all Mongolian groups.



The *ger* is not only the center of the universe but also a microcosm within it. In fact, it is a map of the universe at large, and the vault of the heavens is reflected in the arched shape of the interior of the *ger* roof. The entrance always faces south, since that is the front of the *ger*. The north side, called

the *hoimor*, located behind the fire, is the most honored spot in the *ger*. It is here that the sacred objects, *ongon* spirit dwellings, and other religious images are placed on a table. The sitting place next to the *hoimor* is the next most honored part of the *ger* and is occupied by elders, chiefs, shamans, or other respected guests. The right, or west, side is the male side and is the sitting place for men and the storage place for men's tools, saddles, bows, and guns. The left, or east, side is the sitting place for women, and cooking utensils, cradleboards, and other women's objects are placed there. Since the south side is the least-honored spot, young people are usually seated there, to the left and right of the entrance.

Movement in the *ger* is "sunwise," that is, in a clockwise direction. The reason why this is regarded as the path of the sun becomes readily apparent if one watches the track traced by sunlight shining through the smoke hole during the day. Whenever a person moves inside the *ger*, it must always be in a sunwise direction. This same sunwise movement is also required in shamanic dances, worship, and ritual. The only exception is the movement of women between the door and their section of the *ger*, which is easiest to get to by walking to the right upon entering the door. This short counterclockwise path is contrary to sunwise and is called "the direction of the moon."

The center of the *ger* is the most sacred place of all, the *gal golomt*, or the place of the fire. It is the dwelling place of the daughter of Father Heaven, Golomt Eej, and is to be treated with the utmost respect. As the *ger* is the center of the world, so the place of the fire is the center of the universe represented by the *ger* itself. The vertical axis represented by the column of smoke rising from the *gal golomt* also represents the *turge* or World Tree that shamans ascend to the upper world, with the smoke ring (*tono*) corresponding to the gateway to the upper world. In some shamanist rituals, such as the initiation of shamans in Buryatia, a tree will actually be erected inside the *ger*, beside the *gal golomt* and passing through the smoke hole. Among some Mongolian groups, such as the Buryats, the shaman literally climbs the tree; in others, such as the Dagurs, the shaman drums at the base and only ascends with his

spiritual being. As the shaman ascends the tree in his ecstatic state, he describes his journey to the upper world. Also, even in the absence of an actual *turge* tree, the shaman will still travel to other worlds after exiting through the smoke hole, often after his spirit has metamorphosed into a bird.

The *ger*, therefore, can be seen as a parallel to the Native American medicine wheel, a physical representation of the sacred circle orientated to the four directions and the universe at large. The circular pattern and alignment to the four directions are also retained in outdoor shamanist ceremonies, such as the walking and dancing around the sacred *oboo* cairns erected to mountain spirits, or the *yohor* dance around a *turge* tree by which the dancers raise a spiral of energy to carry the shaman to the heavens. Sunwise circular movement is also used in the *dallaga* blessing ceremony and in all types of shamanist dances.¹

The Upper and Lower Worlds and the World Center

Throughout Siberia, as well as among many Native American groups, people believe that the universe consists of three worlds laid one upon the other. In some ways, ideas about the upper and lower worlds seem to imply a concept of parallel worlds, rather than that of three worlds stacked, literally, like the layers of a cake. While the sky is believed to be infinite in depth, shamans nevertheless insist that there is a doorway to go beyond the heavens. In the same way, while the earth is believed to be deep and solid, there are many passages that allow spirits and shamans to penetrate into the lower world. Another view holds that the upper and lower worlds are similar to the earth, or middle world, in that they too have a sun, a moon, forests, and humanlike inhabitants. The dwellers of the upper and lower worlds are invisible in our middle world, and people traveling from here to those worlds are likewise invisible. The presence of such intruders will be betrayed by a sudden crackle in the fire, the barking of foxes, or by their being visible to shamans.

The lower world is basically similar to this world except that its inhabitants have only one soul, rather than the three possessed by human beings. (The three human souls are the *suld*, *ami*, and *suns* souls. See chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of their functions.) The *ami* soul, which causes breathing and warmth in the body, is lacking, so lower-world dwellers are cold and have dark blood. Furthermore, some of the dwellers in the lower world are actually the *suns* souls of human beings awaiting reincarnation. The sun and moon of the lower world are not as bright as in this world; the Samoyed say it is because the sun and moon of the lower world are actually half, rather than full, orbs. The lower world has forests, mountains, and settlements, just like this world, and its inhabitants even have their own shamans. The ruler of the lower world is Erleg Khan, son of Father Heaven. He has authority over the disposition of souls, when and where they will incarnate. Shamans often must appeal to him when recovering souls that have prematurely wandered away to the lower world before the body has died. Outside of these situations, people from the middle world rarely enter the realm of Erleg Khan, except after death.²

Travel to and from the lower world takes many routes. One route is by way of the World River, known as Dolbor or Engdekit, which flows roughly from south to north. In the far north the river flows into the lower world, and its entrance is protected by the giant Mongoldai Nagts, who prevents *suns* souls from entering the lower world before the bodies in which they were ensouled are truly dead. Nevertheless, sometimes souls occasionally do slip through and must be retrieved before the illness caused by the souls' absence causes permanent damage. Travel along the World River is perilous, and the river is full of rapids. It is said that when a shaman falls dead during a lower-world soul retrieval it is because the trip was too dangerous and his soul was lost. During his journey to the lower world the shaman may confront and need to placate Mongoldai Nagts and Erleg Khan to convince them to let the soul return. The lower world may also be entered through caves, whirlpools, springs, or one of the many tunnels

through the earth that lower-world beings use to travel up to this world.

The upper world, like the lower world, appears very similar to this world. The upper world, however, does not normally house the spirits of human beings, although shamans may travel there. It is brighter than this world, and some legends say that it has seven suns. Descriptions of the upper world say that it resembles the earth, but nature in that world is still unspoiled, and its inhabitants still live in the traditional ways of the ancestors. The ruler of the upper world is Etseg Malaan Tenger, who is also a son of Father Heaven. Sometimes the brightness of the upper world will be revealed when the doorway between the worlds is opened, as when rays of sunlight are seen shooting out from behind the clouds; prayers said when the doorway is revealed are especially powerful.³

Travel to the upper world requires the ability to fly, and shamans often change themselves into birds in order to make the journey. They may also ride upon a flying deer or horse. The route may be straight upward, or toward the south, to the source of the World River. Some accounts of shamanist initiations involve travel to the upper world and initiation by the spirits there before the shamans' initiation in this world. Another way of travel to the upper world is for the shaman to climb the *turge*, the World Tree, mentioned earlier. Sometimes he is spurred on by a *yohor* circle dance around the tree intended to raise his windhorse energy and propel him upward.⁴

Yet another route is suggested by the Dagur Mongol word for shamans' power dreams—*soolong*. In standard Mongolian *solongo* means "rainbow," and the shaman may be traveling in his sleep over the rainbow to the upper world in order to retrieve the information that is brought back from the dream. In the Buryat shamans' initiation this is symbolized by a rainbow made from ribbons or ropes extending from the top of the ceremonial *turge* tree to a tree outside the *ger* where the initiation is taking place. In former times some shamans would actually walk on these ropes while in an ecstatic state. In the

Geser myth people travel to the upper world on a rainbow on several occasions.⁵

As mentioned above, the *ger* represents the center of the world. In reality, each person stands at the center of the world in his or her own consciousness. In doing their work and during their rituals shamans also locate themselves in the center of the world. Many different images are associated with the center of the world. The most familiar one is that of the place of the fire in the *ger*, which is the meeting point between the earth and the axis connecting the three worlds.

The other important symbol of the world center is the *turge* tree, which creates an axis as well as a pole for ascent and descent. Siberian and Mongolian traditions locate the tree at the center of the world, but also in the south, where the upper and middle worlds touch. The tree is tended by the goddess Umai, and the *ami* souls of living things waiting to be born are believed to live as birds on this immense tree. By the World Tree, which some say “stands at the border of day and night,” the World River enters the middle world from its sources in the upper world. According to the traditions of the Altai, Bayan Ami, lord of the forest animals, will be encountered during the ascent of this tree and will grant the shaman geese to assist him on his journey to the upper world. The top of the *turge* tree touches the sky by the Pole Star, the Altan Hadaas, the sky nail that holds up the heavens.⁶

The other image of the center of the world is the peak of Mount Sumber, the World Mountain. The peak at the center of the world is close to the Pole Star, and its roots rest upon a turtle in the lower world. Many Buryat legends speak of a golden tree or grove of trees on the summit that stand next to a spring from which flows the Water of Life. The leaves of this tree and the water heal all illnesses. This tree, also known as the “nine-branched bright yellow tree,” is another form of the *turge* tree. It is symbolized by the Buryat shamanist myth of Abai Geser, which consists of nine *halaa*, or “branches,” corresponding to the nine branches of the *turge*.

In the Geser myth the image of the fire, the world’s center, and the World Tree are beautifully united in one scene. The

hero's wife, the warrior woman and shamaness Alma Mergen, makes an offering to the fire goddess Golomt Eej, who was born at the time of the separation of Father Heaven and Mother Earth. When Alma Mergen makes the offering a golden willow tree springs forth from the fire. The World Tree is said to be a willow. This is interesting because the willow is a water-loving tree, and water is believed in Siberian tradition to be a passageway for spirits. Thus the golden willow was none other than the *turge* tree presenting itself to the shamaness who had made the offering to the fire! As one Buryat shaman said to me, "Wherever I go, there is the center of the world."

Windhorse and *Buyanhishig*

Shamanism is concerned with personal power and bringing good fortune into one's life. In the context of the cosmology described above, one must remember the saying, "Everyone has his own universe, everyone has his own path." While every day brings an individual into contact with the personal worlds of others, the core issues of life lie within one's personal universe. In this individual aspect of the cosmos, a person stands at the perfect center of the universe, supported by Mother Earth and enveloped in the clear blue vastness of Father Heaven. At the center one's cosmic soul (*suns*) shines as a bright white star, and the body soul (*ami*) is a red point of light. One can fly freely within the vastness of space or travel upon the earth. Because one has his or her own path, one is ultimately responsible for his or her own actions.⁷

Personal psychic power is called *hii* (wind), or *hiimori* (windhorse). This force resides in the chest and will vary in strength according to how one uses and accumulates it. Very strong windhorse allows one to think clearly and analytically and see through deception. Windhorse is the force that allows shamans and other powerful people to accomplish what needs to be done simply and easily. The concept of windhorse is also found in Tibetan religion and has essentially the same meaning. This originates from ancient Central and North Asian religious traditions which developed into the Bon religion in Tibet and shamanism in Mongolia and Siberia.

Use of one's personal power for harmful ends or to upset the balance of the universe depletes windhorse, which is one reason why truly evil people tend toward self-destructive behavior over time.

On the other hand, windhorse can be increased through religious practice and by actions aimed at restoring balance in the universe. Simple everyday actions—such as offering drink to heaven, earth, and the ancestors; prayer; and veneration of heaven, earth, and the spirits of the ancestors and nature—foster windhorse. Sacred smoke from incense, sage, thyme, juniper, and other herbs can raise windhorse during shamanist worship. Sacrifices are another way to raise windhorse if made for specific purposes or at the traditional festivals.

A related concept to windhorse is *buyanhishig*, which is blessing from heaven or the spirits. One can view *buyanhishig* as being like a bank account that can be increased or decreased according to one's actions. A large accumulation of *buyanhishig* (also known as *buyan* for short) will result in good fortune, protection from harm, and happiness. One can also lose *buyan* by violating taboos, showing disrespect for the spirits or the ancestors, or offending the spirits of nature by killing animals for no purpose. Lack of proper personal hygiene is also harmful to *buyan*. *Buyan* is increased through acts of generosity such as giving food and drink to visitors and donating goods to needy people. *Buyan*, like windhorse, is also increased through living an upright (*yostoi*) life and through religious acts and sacrifices. Father Heaven and the spirits can also be called through the *dallaga* ritual, which literally beckons *buyan* into one's life, or into the community when done collectively. It is done by making a circular motion with the hands in a sunwise fashion accompanied by the words "*hurai, hurai, hurai!*"

By being conscious of windhorse and *buyan* one can walk one's life path in power, in safety, and with good fortune. This attitude toward life creates self-awareness in one's actions and consciousness of how individual actions shape one's own fate. The ideal person learns to live *yostoi* ("following the customs"), which means living respectfully and not violating the taboos against upsetting balance in the world.

The following exercise will create the sacred circle and raise windhorse and *buyanhishig*.

Ritual of the Sacred Circle and Four Directions

Things Needed for Ritual:

- Small table
- Stick incense and holder (sandalwood or wisteria is especially good)
- Sage smudge stick (optional)
- Juniper (optional)
- Thyme (optional)
- One or three candles
- Drum, rattle, or bell
- Three rocks
- Liquor or milk
- Bowl

This ritual requires enough floor space to walk out a circle at least eight feet in diameter; it can be done outside or inside.

Setup for Ritual

Select a ritual space and be sure to be aware of its orientation to the four directions. This sacred circle will delineate a space reflecting the map of the universe embodied in the *ger*. This ritual can be performed by one person or by a group.

Set up the small table at the northernmost point of the circle. This will be your altar. On the table place the one or three candles and any sacred objects that are important to you such as crystals, sacred images, and so forth. Take the bowl and fill it with liquor or milk. Take the three rocks and, walking in a clockwise fashion, place them at the eastern, southern, and western points of the circle. Once they are in place, if possible, avoid kicking the rocks during the ritual.

If you have a smudge stick, use it to smudge the circle; otherwise use three sticks of incense held together. (*Hint: if*

you have a problem that needs answering, the burning of the three sticks can show an answer. Use your imagination!) Light the smudge or incense sticks and, waving them in a circular clockwise motion, walk around the circle, making sure that every inch of the perimeter receives smoke. The circle should start from the altar (*shiree*) on the northernmost side (*hoimor*). The smoke will cleanse the circle of any foreign influences or spirit intrusions.

After completing the cleansing of the circle, place the three sticks of incense in a holder in the center of the circle, to represent the place of the fire (*gal golomt*). If you have juniper, light it and place it in a burner. If you have thyme, burn it with the juniper in the same burner. Pass it around yourself three times; if there is a group, walk around the group clockwise three times holding the burner. You should wave smoke into each person's face, or have each participant wave smoke into his or her own face. Sacred smoke opens the spirit channels of one's body and raises windhorse. If you are not using juniper and thyme, do this with the incense. Once this is done, bow to the sacred smoke and say:

Golden-edged Golomto, daughter of Father Heaven, We
thank you and ask your blessing.

Taking the three incense sticks, wave them in a circular motion, saying "*hurai, hurai, hurai*" while completing three circles.

Wave the incense sticks in the direction of the altar nine times, then replace them in their holder. If the sticks burn down during the ritual, replace them before they go out.

The Ritual of the Four Directions

Walk up to the altar and pick up the bowl containing the liquor or milk. Dip your right ring finger into the liquid and flick it three times over the altar. Then take your drum (or bell or rattle), hit it three times, and say:

Father Heaven, Mother Earth

Spirits of the ancestors

Spirits of the animals

Spirits of nature

Tenger of the four directions

Bayan Ulgen, Erleg Khan, Bayan Ahaa, Umai

Nature spirit of this place

Raise our windhorse

Bring us blessing, *hurai, hurai, hurai*

(wave drum clockwise three times, other participants wave their hands).

If you have any power animals or other spirit guides you can mention their names in this prayer as well (see the glossary beginning on page 179 for proper pronunciation of the names of the spirits).

Walk around the circle to the rock marking the southern point, all the time drumming (or rattling or ringing).

Then say:

Fifty-five *tenger* of the red southern direction

Usan Khan, lord of the waters

Direction of the upper world

Source of our body souls

Raise our windhorse

Bring us blessing, *hurai, hurai, hurai* (circular motion).

Continue drumming; walk around to the western point of the circle and say:

Fifty-five *tenger* of the white western direction

Who sent us Eagle, the first shaman

Raise our windhorse

Bring us blessing, *hurai, hurai, hurai* (repeat motion).

Resume drumming, walk back to the altar, and say:

Seventy-seven *tenger* of the black northern direction

Tatai Tenger, bringer of lightning

Direction of the lower world

Raise our windhorse

Bring us blessing, *hurai, hurai, hurai* (circular motion).

Walk around to the eastern point of the circle and say:

Forty-four *tenger* of the blue eastern direction

Thirteen Ajirai Tenger

Raise our windhorse

Bring us blessing, *hurai, hurai, hurai*

(make circular motion again).

Walk back to the rock marking the southern direction to complete the circle, then walk around the circle two more times, continuously drumming. All those walking the circle will raise their windhorse. At no time in this ritual should anyone walk in a counterclockwise direction. After walking around a total of three times the circle has been consecrated. You or any other participants can stomp the floor or ground to drive away any evil influences in the vicinity of the circle. To raise extra windhorse, you can walk around the circle six more times for a total of nine circumambulations.

This ritual is good for raising windhorse and bringing down blessing. It is also a preparation for more advanced shamanic work that can be done inside the circle after it has been established. After conclusion of the ritual, extinguish all of the candles and other burning materials and pick up the first stone in the direction in which you will be leaving. Then pick up the other stones while walking sunwise around the circle. If this ritual is being done in preparation for other shamanic rituals, leave the rocks in place, but exit the circle through the southern, front end if possible.

Chapter 2

The Natural World

Stiffly projecting standing mountain masters

Noisily rushing flowing water masters

Spread-out standing mountain masters

We ask blessing from you

Flowing water masters

Whirling river-bend masters

Airily blowing wind masters

Lying down stone masters

We ask blessing from you

—Prayer to the Starry Sky, Halh Mongolia, from
Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*



The endless stretches of taiga, the immensity of the blue sky over the steppe, and the majesty of Lake Baikal and the Altai, Hangai, and Sayan Mountains inspired awe and wonder among the Altaic peoples of Siberia and Mongolia. Living off the land and depending on nature for their sustenance created respect for living creatures, even though they had to be killed for human survival. Waste was taboo, an insult to Father Heaven and the spirits of nature. Human beings' relationship with nature was seen as one of interdependence rather than exploitation, and this reverence for the natural world allowed for the survival of Siberian cultures for thousands of years on their land without degradation of their environment. This way of life is well expressed in the ideal of *tegsh*, living one's life in balance with the world and preserving balance in nature and human society. Human culture and society are not actually seen as unique or different from those of other living things; rather, human society, even at its most complex, is still only an expression of natural processes. The mythology of Siberian peoples, especially the tales (*uliger*) that parents tell their children to explain why things in nature are the way they are show that animals and even trees think much the same way as human beings and may even appear as human beings under certain circumstances. The forest, mountains, lakes, rivers, rocks, and trees all have their spirits, and they need to be respected for their gifts to mankind in the form of foodstuffs and shelter. This chapter will look at the role that the natural world plays in the spirituality of Mongolian and Siberian peoples.

Father Heaven, Mother Earth, and Heavenly Objects

The core beings in the Mongolian shamanist religion are Father Heaven, Tenger Etseg, and Mother Earth, Gazar Eej. In history, Chinggis Khan, the unifier of the Mongolian nation, based his power on a mandate from Tenger himself, and he began all his declarations with the words "by the will of Eternal Blue Heaven." Father Heaven is worshiped for what he is, the timeless and infinite blue sky. He is not visualized as a person, although he is said to have sons. Worship of Father Heaven and Mother Earth is almost universal in Siberia and is found in North America as well.

The weather is seen as a direct manifestation of Tenger's disposition. Tenger is the creator and sustainer of balance in the world, and the natural processes of weather and the circular motion of the seasons are sustained through him. Lightning is a sign of Tenger's displeasure or an indication of a site of high spiritual power. When a lightning strike is a sign of displeasure, a shamanist ritual and *yohor* dance may be done at the site where the lightning hit in order to send the lightning back up to heaven. Objects struck by lightning, or meteorites and ancient artifacts, are called *tengeriin us* (heaven's hair) or *tenger iin sum* (heaven's arrow). They contain a spirit (*udha*) that is a concentrated package of heaven's power. Lightning-struck objects (*neriyer udhatai*) and meteorites (*buumal udhatai*) can be placed in milk or liquor to energize the liquid with the spirit of the object. Shamans drink this preparation to incorporate the power of the *udha* spirit. Another form of *tengeriin us* is the bezoar stone (*zadai*), which is used in rainmaking magic.¹

No shamanist ritual starts without the invocation of Father Heaven, Mother Earth, and the ancestors. Even everyday activities acknowledge Tenger's presence, which is integral to living one's life in alignment with the universe. When a new bottle of liquor is opened, the top portion of the contents is poured into a container, taken outside, and offered to Father Heaven, Mother Earth, and the ancestors. This ritual, called *tsatsah*, is an important one in the religion of Mongolia and Siberia. Afterward, before drinking, everyone will also dip their right ring finger in the liquid and flick the liquor three times, also to Heaven, Earth, and the ancestors. Housewives also offer milk, tea, or water in the same way every morning; if possible, they will walk around the *ger* flicking the liquid three times in each of the four directions.

Tenger's role in determining fate is acknowledged in everyday speech in phrases such as *tengeriin boshig* (heaven's will). Women are required to keep their kitchens and cooking utensils clean because to allow them to become dirty is an insult to Father Heaven. Prayers and offerings are made to Tenger on holidays and at times of sacrifices to the mountain spirits. One also performs a special private sacrifice to Father Heaven in times of emergency. Rainmaking rituals directly address Tenger, and they may be held at *oboo* shrines dedicated to Tenger and the mountain spirits. Every human being has the right to appeal directly to Tenger for help; however, when balance has been disrupted by calamity or the intrusion of a powerful spirit, a shaman will use the power of his spirits to restore his patient's connection with Tenger and his state of balance with the universe.

The crown chakra of each human being has a small piece of Tenger residing in it; it is the point of connection between the individual standing in the center of his world and heaven above. This point

receives energy from Tenger that flows down the center of the person's soul sphere. This piece of Tenger in a person's crown resembles a star, and it shines brighter or dimmer according to the strength of the person's windhorse. At death, the star goes out.²

Mother Earth (Gazar Eej), like Father Heaven, is not visualized in human form, but for what she literally is, the earth from which we draw nourishment. She is also called Itugen, and the names for shamans, especially female shamans, are variations on her name (*yadgan*, *utgan*, *udagan*, and so on). This naming practice implies that shamans have a strong association with the veneration of Mother Earth. In the Yakut *dalbyy* ritual the shaman is sucked down into the earth during the opening part of the ritual while he is invoking the spirits. The most powerful shamans may sink as deep as their shoulders, then they emerge empowered for their healing work.³

Trees are a manifestation of Mother Earth's power, and worship of Mother Earth may be done at trees that suitably reflect her power and beauty. Like trees, all human beings draw strength from Mother Earth below as well as receive the energy of Father Heaven at the crown of the head. Mother Earth's daughter, Umai, is the womb goddess and caretaker of the body souls roosting in the World Tree. Umai is also known as Tenger Niannian, which comes from the Tungus word for "soil." Both Mother Earth and her daughter Umai are appealed to for fertility. Another daughter of Mother Earth and Father Heaven, Golomt, the spirit of fire, is spoken of as begotten by flint and iron. Burning beneath the smoke hole in the center of the earth, with the sunlight falling upon it from above and itself created by products of the earth—minerals and plant materials—fire is a reenactment of the original union between heaven and earth. The light of the fire is a reminder of the light of heaven, and its heat recalls the nurturing quality of earth.

The sun and moon are the eyes of Tenger; they are also seen as two sisters, and their essences are fire and water. Their light represents the power of Tenger shining eternally upon the earth. The cycles of the sun and moon demonstrate the circularity of time and all other natural processes. For that reason, time is irrelevant from the standpoint of Siberian shamanism. Time cycles infinitely, so each point in time is in contact with every other. For that reason, time and distance have no meaning in shamanic rituals, and a shaman can be in direct contact with any time or location without moving. The shaman, while shamanizing,³ stands at the virtual center of the earth, where the three worlds touch, and the center of the earth can be anywhere and in any time.

The amount of *buyanishig* (blessing) available from heaven seems to vary directly with the moon cycle; the most powerful days are at the times when the moon is new or full. The sun and moon time cycles are seen as corresponding to the male and female principles. The sun cycle regulates the power of *arga*, physical strength, while the moon cycle represents the female power of *bilig*, intellect. The sun cycle, the solstices as well as the equinoxes, is coordinated with the moon cycle in the setting of dates for festivals. For instance, the White Moon Festival (Sagaalgan), which starts the year, is held on the second new moon after the winter solstice, and the Red Round Festival (Ulaan Tergel) is held on the full moon closest to the summer solstice.

Several other heavenly bodies are considered to have spiritual power. One is the planet Venus, Tsolmon, which can appear both in the morning and at night. It is often painted on shaman drums to invoke its power. Tsolmon is the sender of comets and meteors, which are called war arrows. The Big Dipper is called the Doloon Obgon (the Seven Old Men). It points to the location of the Pole Star (Altan Hadaas), which holds up the sky. The observation that this constellation rotates around the axis of the Pole Star through the year led to the creation of the *has temdeg* (swastika) symbol, which actually represents the position of the Big Dipper as it moves in the night sky. Interestingly, this symbol is found not only in Siberia but in Hindu culture and in several Native American cultures as well. Its widespread use among peoples with historical links to Central and North Asia is evidence of its origin in very ancient times, when shamanism was practiced by the ancestors of Hindus, Tibetans, Mongols, and Native Americans. The Pleiades (Mushid) are revered as another group of powerful spirits, and they mark the place where the sky spirits of the western direction met to decide to send Eagle to the earth as the first shaman. During the White Moon Festival, fourteen incense sticks are kept lit, seven for the Seven Old Men and seven for the Pleiades. The Milky Way is known by many names, including *tengeriin oyodol* or *tengeriin zaidel* (heaven's seam), *tengeriin sudal* (heaven's blood vessel), and several terms meaning "the birds' way." It is a route of travel for souls flying through the sky in the form of birds. According to Buryat Mongol mythology, the *tenger* (sky spirits) were born from the Milky Way.⁴

The Ancestors

The spirits of the ancestors are invoked in all rituals along with Father Heaven and Mother Earth. According to Siberian and Mongolian shamanist tradition, the soul actually consists of multiple parts, usually three, each of which has a different fate after death. One subsoul, known as the *suld* or *unen fayenga*, remains on earth perpetually as an ancestral spirit. Ancestral spirits remain in contact with their descendants and other relatives, usually as protectors and helpers. After several generations these spirits no longer remain with their relatives' households, but are available and ready to help when called. By that time they have become part of the group of ancestors invoked as *deedes mini* during prayer.⁵

After ceasing to reside with their relatives, ancestral spirits, will usually take up residence in a natural place such as a rock, spring, or tree. They can be called by shamans as helper spirits during rituals and settled into an *ongon* spirit house. If the spirit is needed to watch over a patient for an extended period of time, the *ongon* will be left with the patient until he recovers; then it is returned to the shaman. Ancestors who died tragically or who died very young are powerful, but often aggrieved, because they did not live long enough to have a fulfilling life with a spouse and many children. Shamans may need to calm them down in order for their spirits not to cause disease or mental disturbances in the living people they contact (see the special ritual "Erecting a Prayer Tree for World Peace" at the close of chapter 8). Once mastered, however, these strong spirits are potent protectors and powerful helper spirits for shamans because they are then allowed to make a positive contribution to human life, which they may not have been able to do before their death.

Certain spirits are recognized as ancestors even though they are not necessarily ancestors in a literal sense. Mongols revere Blue Wolf and Red Deer as their distant ancestors, and the western Buryat Mongols have a mythical ancestor named Buh Noyon Baabai (Prince Father Bull). Many Siberian groups regard the bear as an ancestor; in fact, the Mongolian word for bear is actually a form of the word for "father" (*baabgai*). Chinggis Khan is regarded as a protector ancestor spirit of the Mongolian people and is worshiped both as a patron of the nation and a protector of marriage. The sacred place of Mongolian dwellings usually includes pictures of Chinggis Khan and deceased relatives as well as any *ongons* that shamans may have created for the family's use.

Tenger, Chotgor, and Other Nature Spirits

There are many different types of spirits in the sky and in nature; some are very strong and cannot be mastered by shamans, others are relatively easy to control. Of course, one must keep in mind that no spirit should be disturbed or controlled unless for the purpose of restoring balance. Spirits are not considered greater or lesser than living things with bodies, only different in essence, and therefore they should be treated with the same respect as human beings or animals.

The strongest of the nature spirits are the sky spirits, the *tenger*, who should not be confused with Tenger Etseg, Father Heaven. The *tenger* live at each of the four directions, but there are fifty-five great *tenger* of the west, forty-four great *tenger* to the east, seventy-seven great *tenger* in the north, and fifty-five great *tenger* in the south. The eastern and western *tenger* are associated with the black and white shamans in those Siberian tribes that make the distinction; however, it is preferable to call for assistance from the *tenger* of all four directions. The western *tenger* are said to have created man, the dog, and all the food animals, while the eastern *tenger* created the eagle, the animals forbidden to eat, and the disease spirits. Because the world needs balance between good and bad in order to be stable, the eastern *tenger* are not necessarily considered evil. The greatest of the western *tenger* is Esteg Malaan Tenger, son of Father Heaven and lord of the spirits of the upper world. The greatest of the eastern *tenger* is Erleg Khan, Esteg Malaan Tenger's brother and lord of the spirits of the lower world. Usan Khan, the lord of the water spirits, is invoked from the southern direction; Huherdei Mergen, also known as Tatai Tenger, is invoked from the northwest and is the controller of violent weather, lightning, and tornadoes. *Tenger* are very powerful and cannot be controlled, but they can be called upon for assistance during shamanist rituals. Other sky spirits include the *endur*, *khans*, and *zayaans*; the last two types of spirits are called by shamans for assistance during their work.⁶

The earth is home to a great variety of spirits. An earthly counterpart to the *tenger* of the four directions in the heavens are female spirits within the earth, the seventy-seven *itugen*, and the water spirits, or *lus*, who are both male and female. Nature spirits are called *chotgor*, *ozoor*, *ongon*, *burhan*, and *gazriin ezen* spirits. Among many Siberian tribes these nature spirits are known collectively as the *ayyy*. *Chotgor* spirits, also known as *kut* or *abaasy*, are frequently the cause of disease, mental illness, or confusion. Some *chotgor* are simply the *suns* spirits of dead people who did not find their way to the lower world or came back through one of the tunnels connecting the

earth and the lower world. In such cases a shaman simply needs to send them to their proper home. Other troublesome spirits have never been incarnated but simply exist in nature. After being mastered by a shaman they can become helper spirits. *Ozoor*, *ongon*, and *burhan* spirits are generally neutral in their effects on people but may occasionally cause problems. *Ozoor* and *ongon* spirits are frequently the *suld* souls of ancestors that are freely ranging in nature. They are some of the most important helper spirits of shamans. *Burhan* spirits are very strong and usually cannot be mastered by a shaman but are simply urged to leave a patient alone if one is the cause of an illness. A sacrifice may be needed to appease a stubborn *burhan* that does not want to leave an ill person. Shamans with very strong spirit helpers may be able to gain control of a *burhan*; thus tamed, it becomes a less powerful *ongon* spirit. Disasters and accidents can sometimes spontaneously create a new *burhan* spirit; in such cases the intervention of a shaman is necessary to reverse the trauma to human spirits caused by the calamity.⁷

Gazriin ezen are the master spirits of places on the earth, including mountains, bodies of water, rocks, trees, settlements, buildings, even countries. They will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but the point should be made here that they sometimes come in conflict with ancestor spirits that want to inhabit the spots in nature that belong to them. Some funeral customs are directed at reconciling the *suld* spirit of the deceased and the *gazriin ezen* so that the ancestor spirit will be able to reside peacefully in nature.

Spirits of Animals, Totems, Animal Guides, and Hunting Magic

The world of the forest and waters is home to the wild animals upon which man relies to survive. Animals are called *amitan*, “having an *ami* soul,” because like human beings they possess an *ami* body soul that provides the breath and warmth of the living body. *Ami* souls of animals usually reincarnate as newborn members of their species; thus deer return as more deer, seals return as seals, bears reincarnate as bears. Since they have souls, animals are considered to have personalities, language, and even psychic abilities, just like humans.

The master spirit of all the hunting animals is known as Bayan Ahaa (Rich Older Brother) or Bayan Ami (Rich Body Soul). Hunters appeal to him for luck in finding game. The highest ranking animals of the forest are the Siberian tiger, the snow leopard, and the bear. Buryats call the tiger Anda Bars (Best Friend Tiger) and pray to him for good hunting. In much of Siberia the bear is seen as a master of the animals and is revered as an ancestor. As mentioned earlier, in Mongolian his name, *baabgai*, is a form of the word for “father.” Many Siberian tribes have special ceremonies for honoring the bear after he is killed.

Because animals possess reincarnating souls, there are many rules regarding the killing of game so that their souls will not be offended. Otherwise, they may become angry and refuse to return to the tribal hunting grounds, or they may tell other animal spirits to stay away. When a small animal is killed for its fur, the hunter will put the animal in his hat and wave it around sunwise three times, saying “*hurai, hurai, hurai!*” This pleases the animal spirits and brings *buyanhishig* to the hunter through the *dallaga* gesture. When a large animal is killed or a large fish is caught, the hunter or fisherman may cry over its death to appease the animal spirit. Hunters also apologize to animals when they are killed, saying that they needed to take the meat and hide for their survival. Domestic animals are also killed in a respectful manner. Animals are never struck on the head because animals also have a small bit of Tenger in the crown of their heads. Sheep are killed in an almost bloodless fashion by cutting the belly open and pinching the aorta. Heads are not chopped off because cutting the throat injures the *ami* soul. The head, throat, lungs, and heart, which are collectively called the *zuld*, are the residence of an animal’s *ami* and should be removed from the body as one piece and boiled together before being cut apart to be eaten. When an animal is killed for a sacrifice the hide and the *zuld* are hung up on poles pointing to heaven. After bears are eaten the skull, or sometimes the whole skeleton, is placed on a pole or platform in the forest, a custom known among the Buryats as *baabgain yoholol*.⁸

This respect for animal spirits is the reason for certain rules connected with hunting. First, when entering the forest one should act reverently and not laugh, run, or yell, but rather move gently and stealthily like an animal. Throwing sticks in the woods is an insult to Bayan Ahaa and the forest spirits and therefore taboo (*nugeltei*). Urinating or throwing rocks into bodies of water is likewise forbidden. Animals should never be killed except for food or fur, and the killing should be done in a quick and humane way. Game must be shared in the community and not hoarded, and the carcass

must be butchered in a customary (*yostoi*) manner. Following these simple rules ensures the return of game and a good relationship with the animal spirits.⁹

Rivers, lakes, streams, and the ocean are home to the water animals as well as passageways for spirits traveling between the worlds. The master spirit of the waters, Usan Khan (King of Water), also known as Uha Loson, is revered by praying to the south. Lake Baikal in Siberia is the home of a very powerful spirit that is called Burhan or Mother Baikal, and offerings are made by the Buryats to placate this spirit and ensure against fishing accidents. The loon and goldeneye duck are considered to be special water birds. There is a legend among the Mongols and many Siberian peoples that in the very earliest time, when the earth was covered with water, the goldeneye duck brought up mud from the bottom of the sea, and when Tenger placed it upon the waters, the first dry land appeared. The loon is a special water bird because of its diving habits. Water is full of spirits, and the loon above all other birds is believed to communicate with the souls in the water. The cry of the loon is imitated in the songs of Mongolian and Siberian shamans.

Among the fish the salmon trout is considered powerful and images of this fish are used in shamanist rituals from the Samoyed in the west to the Tungus in eastern Siberia. Teemu, the killer whale, is considered to be a master spirit of the sea, and the Tungus living on the shores of the Pacific sacrifice wild garlic to Teemu to ensure good catches. The seal, which lives on Lake Baikal in the Buryat Mongol homeland as well as in the Pacific Ocean, is considered to be a special animal, and its remains are placed in the forest like those of the bear.¹⁰

Animals who appear in nature are sometimes actually shamans who take on animal form while traveling in spirit to do their work. They may take the form of birds, mammals, reptiles, or even fish. Some old stories recount occasions when a hunter has killed an animal and a shaman falls dead while conducting a ritual because the animal had actually been his soul. Ancestor spirits or ordinary people's souls may also occasionally take on animal form. The Samoyed believe that a man's soul may take the form of a grouse when out of the body, and one story tells of a hunter who shot a grouse that was actually his own soul. He immediately fell ill, and a shaman saved his life by giving him an egg to house his *ami* soul for the rest of his life. The Dagur Mongols say that certain animals are especially likely to be shamans who are soul traveling; most of these, including the porcupine, snake, fox, weasel, spider, and pheasant, are not normally eaten.¹¹

Some animals are said to be able to extend their lives by special breathing techniques. It is said that if an animal stays out only at night and breathes in a special way while gazing at the moon it can become practically immortal. After doing this for a thousand years it will turn completely black and be able to appear in human form at will. If an animal continues to do this for ten thousand years it will turn white and become very wise. The animals capable of this feat are the fox, sable, spider, pheasant, and porcupine.¹²

Certain animals are considered to be totems or symbolic ancestors for tribes or clans. The most famous are Blue Wolf and Red Deer, the mythical ancestors of the Mongols. The western Buryats also recognize a bull, Buh Noyon Baabai, as their ancestor. Other Buryat totem animals are the swan, wild boar, and the burbot fish. Throughout Siberia the eagle is regarded as a totemic ancestor, and in Mongolia the eagle is associated with the shamanist tradition. The hawk was associated with Chinggis Khan and his lineage, and Chinggis Khan was said to have received messages from Tenger through a hawk that would land on his shoulder and speak in his ear. Among the Yakut, individual clans recognize a specific mammal or bird as their totem animal. The name of the animal is taboo, and it is referred to in everyday speech by other names. In Mongolian the lack of a literal name for the bear is probably a result of this custom, given that the bear is recognized as an ancestor by almost all Siberian peoples. The name of the wolf is also taboo among many groups in Mongolia; this animal is called by other names such as the "mountain *burhan*."¹³

Animal spirits are also guides and teachers for shamans. According to Yakut tradition, once a shaman has contacted his *udha* shaman spirit, this spirit will introduce him to the power animal that will be his guide. This animal spirit would be called the "animal double," or "animal mother." From that time onward, not only would the shaman be taught by the animal but he would also take on its form while traveling in spirit. As a shaman grows in power, he will add to his collection of power animals. A Mongolian shaman's outfit normally has whole skins or pieces of fur from several different kinds of animals. These skins are not simply for decoration, but are spirit houses for the power animals to which they belong. At the commencement of a ritual the shaman can call their spirits to come into the skins so they will be available to help him in his work.

Of the birds, the eagle and raven are thought to have a special relationship with shamans. As one of my teachers used to say, “The raven is the shaman’s friend,” and I have noticed that ravens often appear during shamanist ceremonies. The eagle is revered because the eagle was the first shaman.¹⁴

Hunting is a special sort of interaction with the animal spirits that is regulated by many different customs designed to allow for the use of animals without offending their spirits. If animal spirits are angered by carelessness or waste, a hunter or even a whole community may be punished with poor luck in finding food. Siberian hunters have a great understanding of the habits of their game animals and attribute humanlike characteristics to them. In the past, hunting trips to gather furs and meat often lasted for weeks, even months, and today some tribes still send large groups of hunters into the forest in pursuit of game. The hunt is always opened with prayers to Bayan Ahaa, master spirit of the forest. At each campsite a snowman or carved image on a tree is made to represent him, and offerings of animal blood and liquor are presented to him in order to bring luck on the hunt.¹⁵

In many tribes shamans do not generally go on the hunt because their spirits are so strong that they may scare away nearby animals. Even so, shamans still perform rituals before the hunters leave the village in order to guarantee hunting luck, and they can also determine if someone in the community may have done something to offend the animal spirits. The spiritual leader in the hunt who does the rituals to bring favor from Bayan Ahaa is usually an elder. Among the Dagur Mongols, the elder will start the hunt by walking a short way into the woods, shooting three arrows into the forest, then returning to the village. This is called “opening the hunt.” While in the forest, hunters will move stealthily like animals and may disguise themselves by wearing whole animal skins covering the upper body and head. When animals are found, they are killed respectfully and the meat is shared equally; in that way the balance between the community and the natural world is preserved.¹⁶

Totems and Sacred Animals

Here I list some of the various totems and sacred animals of Mongolian and Siberian shamanism. This list is by no means complete, for there are many localized customs for other animals as well, but these animals are those which are most commonly honored according to Mongolian and Siberian traditions.

Abarga mogoi: Giant snakes that shaped the rivers in early times.

Abarga shara mogoi: Giant yellow snake that lives underground.

Abarga zagahan: Giant fish honored in the Buryat water ritual.

Bear (baabgai): Its name means “father” in Mongolian. It is honored as a totem spirit and is treated with great honor when killed. It is customarily buried on a platform like a shaman, or its skull is placed on a pole or tree. Most Siberian peoples have euphemistic names for the bear because of its power; the Buryats call it grandfather, while the Evenks have fifty different names for the bear. The bear is said to have sacrificed himself to provide the first reindeer. The Tungus believe that the bear oversees the journey of the *suns* soul to the lower world.¹⁷

Burbot: A freshwater cod, it is a mythical ancestor of the Ekhirit Buryats.

Cuckoo: The cuckoo is believed to represent the shaman, for like a cuckoo chick the shaman is born in the same family as its siblings but is different from the start because of his or her *udha* spirit.^{*4} Dagur shaman costumes actually have cloth cuckoo birds on the shoulders, while Buryats believe it is dangerous to kill the bird.¹⁸

Duck (nugahan): The goldeneye duck is said to have brought the first earth up from the primordial ocean when land was created.

Eagle: The first shaman, also a totem animal of Mongols, Buryats, and most other Siberian tribes. Clans revering the eagle as an ancestor sometimes hand raised eagle chicks for their feathers.¹⁹

Garuda, garudi: See *Han garid*.

Han garid (hahn gar-id): The Mongolian thunderbird, the king of birds, a giant capable of flying into space.

Hawk (eleyen): The hawk is a symbol of fearlessness and ferocity, also of insensitivity to the suffering of others.

Killer Whale (*Teemu*): Master animal of the sea; was given annual offerings of wild garlic for good fishing luck. Its bones would be buried.²⁰

Loon: The loon is considered to have a special relationship with the spirit world because of its diving habits. At the creation of the earth the loon failed to bring up mud from the bottom of the sea and Father Heaven crippled its legs as punishment. Loon skins are burned to bring good weather.²¹

Meadowlark (*buljamuur*): According to Buryat legend the meadowlark has healing power. The daughters of Han Hormasta and Naran Goochon, the daughter of the sun god, travel between the earth and the upper world in the form of meadowlarks.

Raven: Called the “shaman’s friend,” the Raven is the messenger of Erleg Khan. The Raven meets the *suns* soul when it leaves the house and shows it the way to the lower world.

Snow Leopard (*irwes*): The snow leopard and tiger are the two animal masters of the forest. Both big cats are now endangered species in Mongolia and Siberia and are protected by law.²²

Swan (*hun shuwuu or sagaan shuwuu*): Mythical ancestor of the Hongoodor and Khorii Buryats. Buryat myths tell that the daughters of Etseg Malaan Tenger travel between the earth and upper world in the form of swans.

Tiger (*bars*): The tiger is a master spirit of the forest revered by hunters among the Buryat Mongols, Dagur Mongols, and Tungus. It was also a totem of some Siberian clans. Its remains were buried on a platform like the bear. The Siberian tiger is the largest of all cats, over ten feet from nose to the tip of the tail.²³

Turtle (*melhii*): According to Mongolian mythology, when land was created it was placed on the back of a giant turtle.

Sacred Mountains and Trees

Mountains, streams, forests, and individual rocks and trees are all part of Mother Earth but are also the home of *gazriin ezen*, nature spirits. Some, if not all, of them were once souls of human beings, ancestors from so long ago that their numerous descendants no longer remember them and the spirits no longer have any connection with them. Looking back on the hundreds of thousands of years of human history it is easy to imagine how many of these spirits exist out in nature. A mountain or tree of great majesty will be said to have *suld*, which is the same word that is used to refer to the soul that remains in nature after death. Unusual rocks or trees are believed to have strong spirits and are respected or given offerings of tobacco, food, money, liquor, or *but* (ribbons tied on branches). Because these spirits are found throughout nature it is considered taboo to offend them by needlessly damaging natural features or mutilating trees. An angry nature spirit is very powerful and can create many problems for a person or community until a shaman can placate or control it. When a dead person’s *suld* soul goes out into nature, it may come into conflict with *gazriin ezen* spirits if it tries to settle in a place where other spirits are already living; certain prayers are thus said at funeral ceremonies in order to allow the deceased person’s spirit to settle in a place peacefully.

Mountain spirits are considered to be very powerful, and they represent not only the individual power of the *gazriin ezen* of the mountain but also the abundance of Mother Earth herself in that locale. Mountain spirits are prayed to in order to provide good hunting and abundance of food plants. These ceremonies are usually held around the times of the equinoxes and solstices and are often done by the elders of the local clan or tribe. The wolf appears to be especially connected with mountain spirits, because when a horse or other herd animal is stolen by wolves it is the custom to say, “It has been taken by the mountain god.”²⁴

Mountain spirits and other powerful *gazriin ezen* spirits are worshiped at special shrines called *oboo*, which are tall piles of rocks and tree branches. An *oboo* is roughly conical in shape, about six to ten feet tall. When passing by an *oboo*, travelers are required to walk around it three times and place a rock on it. In doing this not only is a person showing respect for the spirit, which would be the least required of him, but in symbolically adding to the spirit’s power by adding the rock he is receiving windhorse and good luck for his journey. In order to get more windhorse (*hiimori*) and *buyanhishig* a person might also make an offering of liquor, milk, or butter. Sometimes car parts will be hung from the tree branches to assure that there will be no breakdowns.

Among the Buryats *oboos* are also made from cut birch trees, often intricately carved and decorated with horsehair and ribbons. Instead of adding rocks, worshipers will tear off a strip from

their clothing or bring a piece of cloth with them for this purpose. A variation on this are the *turges* and *serges*, cut birch trees used in various shamanist rituals, all of which symbolize the World Tree. Most commonly the celebrants of the ritual will do a *yohor* circle dance around the *serge* in order to raise energy for various purposes. This custom is thousands of years old and is depicted in ancient petroglyphs. A similar ritual also exists among the Dene tribes of Alaska, where it is known as the Stickdance. A special kind of *serge* is erected next to cave entrances and is carved to look like a phallus. This type of *serge* is called Baabain Mungun Bagana (Father's Silver Pole) and is placed by caves because caves represent the womb of Mother Earth; the pole balances the feminine energy of the place with the male energy of the phallic symbol.

Oboos are also the sites of several ceremonies during the year that nearby families or clans would celebrate in honor of the local spirit as well as Father Heaven and Mother Earth and other shamanist spirits. During the celebration of the lunar New Year, or White Moon (Tsagaan Sar), an *oboo* is made of snow and offerings are made to Father Heaven. Nearby a fire is built that is not allowed to go out for a month; this fire is called *tengeriin oboo* (*oboo* of Father Heaven). *Oboos* represent not only mountains, but by their upward-pointing nature they also represent a point of closer contact between heaven and earth, just as a mountaintop is considered to be closer to Tenger and therefore spiritually powerful.

In Mongolia and Siberia certain mountains and mountain ranges are considered especially sacred. One of the most famous is Burhan Haldun, which lies in the region where Chinggis Khan was born. It has been sacred since prehistoric times, and burial sites for shamans dot its slopes. The Altai Mountains in Mongolia, Tuva, and southern Siberia are considered sacred, and the spirit of the Altai is known as Altai Aab (Father Altai). When shamans in the Altai region travel to visit the clan spirit, they may first travel to the *ger* of Altai Aab to pay respect. The Sayan Mountains on the border of Buryatia, Mongolia, and Tuva are home to several powerful spirits, and a special type of shaman, the *hadaasha*, performs rituals to honor these spirits. The thirty-three *baatar* of Bukhe Beligte Tenger in the Tunken Valley of the Sayan Mountains are an especially important family of spirits. The capital of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, was founded at its present site almost 400 years ago because of its location in a spiritually powerful spot. It lies in a circular valley surrounded by four holy mountains that are revered throughout Mongolia. The four mountains include the Bogd Uul (literally, "Holy Mountain") to the south, Songino Hairhan to the west, Chinggeltei to the north, and Bayanzurh to the east. Of these, the southern and western mountains are especially interesting. The Bogd Uul is the home of the thunderbird, *han garid*, a huge bird that can cover the sun and moon with its wings and fly into outer space. Songino Hairhan is the home of the spirit of the shaman Songino, who is said to have lived at the time of the founding of Ulaanbaatar. The siting of this city in a circle among four holy mountains located in each of the four directions ensured its protection and blessing from all the spirits residing in such a spiritually powerful place.



The author, holding a tashuur (a stick made from a sacred tree), stands next to the Bumbat Oboo in central Mongolia.

Some trees are considered sacred. Often a tree that stands alone (*gants mod*) is believed to have a powerful spirit that causes the tree to flourish where others have not. Also trees by springs, at mountain passes, and in other special places are recognized as *ongon mod* (*ongon* tree), or *ezetei* (having its own spirit). These trees are recognized as shrines in their own right and are called *barisaa*. At *barisaa*, like at *oboos*, it is customary to tie ribbons or ceremonial silk scarves (*khadag*) to the branches and to leave offerings of money, food, dairy foods, tobacco, or liquor. Trees that are struck by lightning are sacred because they have been specifically shown to be powerful trees by Tenger. In some places there are sacred groves of trees, known as *aikha* or *zuun mod* ("hundred trees"), that are used by shamans as sites for their ceremonies.

Certain trees with unusual growth (often caused by lightning strikes) are traditionally recognized as shaman trees. A shaman tree is a tree whose main trunk's vertical growth stops not far from the ground, and the rest of its vertical growth has been taken over by one or more limbs so that the crown has a cuplike shape. A shamaness tree is a tree where one limb has taken over the vertical growth of the tree, giving it an almost S-like shape. From my experience I have noticed that a good amount of these shaman trees have been larches, but I have also seen oak trees with this unusual growth pattern. The symbolism of the trees may be related to the fact that a shaman's initiatory experience is like the lightning strike that killed the top of the trunk. Once a person becomes a shaman his future life is shaped by his relationship with the spirit world and the spirits influence his future development. While a lightning strike often kills a tree, a shaman tree has recovered; similarly, a shaman may have a life-threatening illness or a near-death experience at the time when the spirits call him.

Some types of trees are considered special in Mongolian shamanism. Among the Dagur there are twelve sacred trees, called *duwalang*, each with its own special bird. In most Mongolian and Siberian traditions, however, the number of trees considered sacred is much less. The pine tree is considered to be sacred because it has "blood"; when it is cut, it bleeds. Therefore cutting pine trees is taboo, and cutting a pine tree will shorten a person's life, according to Buryat tradition. In the past in Siberia the pine tree was used as a burial site for shamans. The bark was carefully peeled back and a resting place for the shaman's body or bones was hollowed out from the living tree. After the shaman's remains were interred the bark was carefully folded back, and within a few years the shaman was completely encased in living wood. The *suld* of the shaman will become the *ezen* of the tree, and the tree thus becomes a sacred site. The fir is also connected with shamanism and its needles are burned for purification in some ceremonies. As mentioned earlier, the World Tree is thought to be a willow, but the willows of Siberia and Mongolia grow much straighter than the willows of North America. Elms (*uliaas*) are revered in Inner Mongolia, especially large ones with broad crowns. Called the "big branchy tree," an elm of this type is used for three types of ceremonies. In the earliest times the "big branchy tree" was a sacred site for Mother Earth, and in some places large-crowned trees are still used for worship of Mother Earth. Some of these trees are also called *tengeriin mod*, "tree of heaven," and are sites for worship of Father Heaven. In fertility ceremonies, the third type of worship done at these large-crowned trees, the tree is called "the grandmother tree" and the ceremonies are directed to Umai.²⁵

The birch, by far the most common broad-leaved tree in Siberia, is used in numerous ways in shamanist ceremonies, from making *serge* and *turge* trees to making wooden implements for handling sacrificial meat. The Buryats refer to the birch as *ekhemodon*, "mother tree," and treat it with reverence.

In Buryat custom, as well as among other Mongols, the unnecessary cutting of a tree is taboo, and the wasting of a tree is said to shorten one's own life, especially if the tree is a pine, birch, larch, or cedar. Overall, trees are important because they are a reflection of the nurturing power of Mother Earth, and they are a symbol of every being's relationship with Father Heaven and Mother Earth, for they draw energy from Tenger above as well as from Mother Earth below. Furthermore, the tree, especially the *toroo*, is a symbol of death and regeneration, for the roots are a mirror of the crown, and the roots reach back in time, as the crown reaches ever upward in the future into the eternal blue sky.

This is one of the standard rituals of Mongolian shamanism, called the *galiin tahlga*, the “fire ritual.” It is a multipurpose ritual that is most commonly used for blessing new ventures, bringing blessing or help to someone who needs it, or for healing someone at a remote location (in which case the shaman visits the patient during his journey).

In this ceremony Father Heaven, Mother Earth, the nature spirits, and the spirit of fire, Golomt Eej, are honored. In preparation for this ceremony the participants bring some item of food or drink to be placed on a table near the fire. A small portion of each item of food and drink will be put in the fire and the rest will remain on the table until the conclusion of the ritual, at which time all the participants will share the food. In some cases the fire ritual may conclude with quite a large meal if many people are involved. Offerings are usually candy, cookies, cheese, fruit, sliced bread, cooked meat or sausage, milk, tea, or vodka (vodka is the liquor preferred by Mongols for shamanist rituals because of its purity).

The fire ritual, for obvious reasons, is usually performed outside and a place in nature is preferable but not required. The fire ritual I will describe, called the *tuksavi*, is a variant used by the Buryats and Tungus. What distinguishes the *tuksavi* is the use of the bag that is thrown to heaven. The standard Mongolian fire ritual does not include the use of the bag.²⁶

Things Needed for Ritual:

- Place to build fire
- A good supply of firewood
- Juniper or sage
- Table
- Pens and sheets of paper
- Plates and cups for food offerings
- Bowl
- Spoon
- Knife
- New medicine bag, medium size, with drawstring, or rabbit skin (rabbit skin is preferable)



Silver offering cup (ayaga) with ceremonial sprinkling spoon (shanaga). The cup bag is decorated with the cloud symbol.

Setup for Ritual

Before the ceremony starts all the people participating should think about what issues, problems, or needs they have in their lives and write them on a small piece of paper. These pieces of paper should be folded up and placed inside the medicine bag. If you have a rabbit skin, tie the bundle with a leather lace or ribbon. The bag will be placed on the offering table so that the officiating shaman (or designated shaman if several are working together) will be able to pick it up and throw it to heaven at the appropriate time in the ritual. Also, three people should be designated from among the participants who will ask questions of the spirits at three points during the ceremony. The food offerings should be arranged on the table in an orderly manner and a knife should be available for cutting off pieces for offering to the fire. If there is a lot of food then a representative sample of each dish should be placed on the table. Before starting, the ceremonial circle in which the shaman will be working should be smudged with sage or juniper. Once the fire is lit, small pieces of the food

offerings as well as juniper or sage should be placed in the fire. Be sure to have a good amount of firewood available, because the fire must not be allowed to go out until the ritual is done, and it has been my experience that when the spirits have been called the fire tends to burn very vigorously. If you have thyme or tobacco available a little should be placed in the fire as well. The offerings will please the spirit of the fire, and furthermore, the smoke will carry their essence to all of the spirits. Take each of the cups of tea, milk, or vodka and, using the spoon, throw a spoonful upward to Father Heaven and pour a small bit upon Mother Earth. Circling the fire, throw a spoonful to each of the four directions, then pour a little into the fire. Place each cup with the remaining liquid back on the table; it may be drunk after the ritual is over.

The Fire Ritual

Once these offerings have been made, the main part of the ritual starts. It should begin with an invocation of Father Heaven, the spirits, and ancestors, and the fire should be circled nine times, as was described in “The Ritual of the Four Directions” in chapter 1; the only difference is that in this case only you and any other people who will be doing shamanic work in the ritual will circle the fire while the other participants will stand at the edge of the ceremonial circle and watch. By the time you have circled nine times you will most likely be very close to a shamanic state of consciousness. It is customary at this point to pray or sing a song welcoming or praising the spirits who are coming to assist in the ritual. Afterward, the first person who has a question should step into the circle. It is not necessary for him or her to say the question aloud, only to say when he or she is done thinking about it. It should be a “yes” or “no” question. Ask the spirits for an answer, then throw your drumstick toward the person who asked the question (be sure to say ahead of time which end is “yes” and which end is “no.” If the stick lands sideways ask the person to hold the drumstick and think again, then throw it one more time.

Continue drumming until you feel yourself in an ecstatic state. You will know when you have reached the appropriate state of mind for the next step of the ritual. You will then pick up the medicine bag and gaze toward heaven. Meditate for a moment on the fact that you are sending all the hopes and wishes contained in the bag to Father Heaven, then with all your strength, hurl the bag upward toward the sky. With this action the requests are sent to heaven. The use of the rabbit skin in this ritual is symbolic in that the rabbit will swiftly carry the messages to Father Heaven. Where the bag lands is not significant. Once this is done, you will throw the drumstick once more for the second question. Afterward, if you feel that a journey is necessary, you may go on a shamanic journey however the spirits lead you. Conclude with a prayer thanking the spirits for their assistance in the ritual. Once this is done, you will throw the drumstick one last time for the third question. Some shamans at this point will go around the circle and, holding the drum over the head of each person watching the ritual, strike the drum three times to drive away any intrusions or unwanted spirits from the person’s soul sphere.²⁷

Once the ritual is concluded each request in the medicine bag may be either returned to the person who wrote it or tied together as a bundle and placed in a sacred place in nature. If the requests are returned to the people who wrote them, the paper should be kept in a sacred place for a year. After the ritual is over the food and drink on the table may be eaten. It is customary for each person to eat a little bit from this food. In Buryat custom, the drinks are passed around the circle and each person sips a little bit in order to partake of the energy that has entered the liquid; this custom is called *joroo*. It is also customary that all the food and drink should be consumed before people leave.

One important note about fire customs: When extinguishing the fire, it is preferable to use water or earth. In any case, no trash should be thrown in the fire or in the earth or water used in putting it out. The place where the fire was should be clean and free of rubbish; otherwise, the fire spirit will be offended. In addition, it makes good sense from the standpoint of safety and of respecting the environment.

While the ritual I described here is used mostly for groups, it is also possible to do the fire ritual alone. In that case, the bag throwing and drumstick throwing may be left out. If done alone, you may use small token offerings of food and drink. The fire ritual may also be done indoors with a fireplace or woodstove; in such circumstances you will walk a small circle in front of the fire rather than around it. During the last part of the ritual, once you have reached a heightened state of consciousness, you may also gaze into the fire for signs. You may note certain patterns in the embers or in the way that the fire is burning that will have significance. Use your intuition.

Chapter 3

The Spirit World

Hooi! Abandoning the resting place of the Tenggis River
Heei! Transmitting the ongod of Tergeling and Huurta
Heei! Transmitting the ongod of Toj and Tolbo
Heei! Toya and Baya are the places we haunt
Hooi! The great black boulder tumbling is my coffin
Heei! The black bull wild beast is my mount
Heei! The vulture black bear is my rolling
Heei! The black velvet eagle is my flapping
Heei! The black and spotted snakes form my [tangledness]
Heei! The owl at night is my haunt
Heei! By the blind lynx at night [I take] my aimed at direction

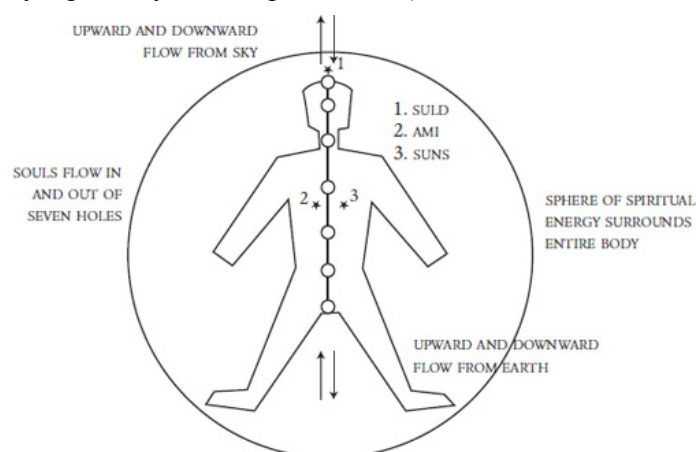
Incantation of the shaman spirits,
Darhad Mongols, from Humphrey
and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*



In the worldview of Mongolian shamanism the spirit world is seen as not being much different from the physical world, except that spirits have a different essence and are therefore invisible. In fact, according to this point of view, the separation of the natural and spirit worlds is rather arbitrary because spirits are in everything everywhere. Spirits have different properties from beings with physical bodies; they can fly and travel anywhere with tremendous speed, communicate telepathically, and see and sense things over great distances or in the past or future. In fact, what Westerners call telepathy or psychic ability is merely the talent of sensing things using the abilities of the spirits that inhabit human beings. People with very strong windhorse are especially capable of using their psychic powers because windhorse raises one's psychic energy. Shamans routinely take on the qualities of spirits during their rituals, being able to fly freely to other places or sense things far away or in spirit form through the aid of their *udha* and other helpers. This chapter will discuss how the relationship between human beings and the spirit world shapes an individual's life and a shaman's work.

The Form and Function of the Three Souls

All humans and animals possess more than one soul; in fact, multiple souls are required in order to keep a physical body alive. Throughout Siberia and Mongolia it is believed that all humans possess at least three souls; some groups, such as the Samoyed, believe there are more, four in women and five in men. These extra souls, however, are not permanent like the core three souls that all Siberian groups agree upon, and the extra one or two souls gradually dissipate after the death of the physical body. Animals also possess two souls, the *ami* body soul and the *suns* soul, both of which reincarnate. For this reason, the game that hunters kill possess souls that return again and again to their habitat and must therefore not be offended. Human beings possess three souls (for simplicity, I give only the Mongolian names):



Human spiritual body and soul components

- the *suld* soul, which resides in nature after death;
- the *ami* body soul, which reincarnates;
- the *suns* soul, which also reincarnates.

Of the three, the one most vital to life is the *suld*; if it is separated from the body, death is practically inevitable. The other two souls may be separated temporarily from the physical body without harm.

The three souls reside in the spherical field of energy that envelops the physical body. This sphere has an upright axis within it, pierced by seven holes that correspond to the seven chakras. The *suld* soul resides at the crown of the head, where there is a direct connection to Father Heaven through the small *tenger* that is also located there. The other two souls oscillate back and forth through the holes of the body axis in a sine-wave pattern.¹

In order to be perfectly balanced, the *suns* and *ami* souls should always be on opposite sides of the axis. When a person becomes excited, the circulation of the souls through the seven holes speeds up, causing the heart to beat faster and creating a feeling of high energy or tension. The

balance of the *suns* and *ami* souls can be disrupted by spiritual attack or physical trauma. In the most serious cases the *ami* or *suns* may be knocked out of the body, and if the soul remains out of the body for a long time, it will result in illness or mental confusion.

Children's souls are considered the most unstable, but they can often be called back by their parents. As people mature, the body's energy field matures, the souls are less easily knocked out of balance, and resistance to outside spiritual forces is stronger. In cases of soul imbalance or loss a shaman's help is needed to restore order. The strength of the souls is proportional to the amount of *hiimori* (windhorse) a person possesses. Human awareness (*setgel*) is centered around the chest area, and the size of the *setgel* depends on the amount of windhorse a person has. The brain is recognized as being important to bodily function, but the ultimate seat of consciousness is in the chest.

The *suld* soul is the most individualized of the three human souls. It lives in a physical body only once, then takes residence in nature. It is located in the crown of the head and is necessary for the body to live. After death it remains around the body for a while, and some groups create *ongon* spirit houses for these souls in order to keep them near and have their aid and protection. After eight or so generations the *suld* will become a nature spirit. The *suld* carries no past-life experiences, so it develops the characteristics that distinguish a person from other people. Charisma and dignity are evidence of a strong *suld* soul; for that reason *suld* is also used to describe the majesty of mountains or trees.

The *ami* is the soul that enlivens the body. Sometimes it is called the breath soul because it is related to the ability to breathe, *amisgal*. Breathing is evidence that the *ami* is within the body; however, at times it will exit the body, resulting in illness. It returns after death to the World Tree, where it roosts in the tree's branches between heaven and earth in the form of a bird. *Ami* souls tend to reincarnate among their relatives and are the carriers of ancestral, or so-called genetic, memory. They are under the care of the womb goddess, Umai, who lives beside the World Tree. She dispatches them on spirit horses, *omisi murin*, to enter the body at the time of birth. While the *ami* may be temporarily displaced during illness, the *ami* does not leave permanently until after death. Twins share one *ami*, which is the reason why there is often a psychic connection between them, especially identical twins. Foxes and wolves are especially sensitive to the presence of stray souls, and when they bark, it is said to be a sign that they have sighted a wandering *ami* soul.²

The *suns* soul, like the *suld* soul, contributes to the formation of personality, but it carries the collected experiences of past lives within it. The *suns* is an inhabitant of the lower world between incarnations, but it may return as a ghost to visit friends or relatives. *Suns* souls that have become lost on their way to the lower world are commonly the cause of hauntings and, at times, illness. It is considered inappropriate to think or talk about people who have recently died because this will attract the soul back to its friends and relatives and hinder its progress to the lower world. The *suns* is commonly thought to follow water courses to the lower world, and so water animals are considered to have a special connection with the spirits. When a person dies the *suns* soul is shown the way to the lower world by the Raven, and its journey is said to be watched by the Bear. Erleg Khan, ruler of the lower world, is responsible for the disposition of the *suns* and determines when and where it reincarnates. If a soul was extremely evil during its life on earth he may send it to Ela Guren, a part of the lower world where souls are extinguished forever. The *suns* may also temporarily leave the body and sometimes wander as far as the lower world, which may require a shaman to negotiate with Erleg Khan for its return.³

Of the two reincarnating souls, the *suns* usually bears the strongest past-life memories. When people remember past lives it is almost always past-life memories of the *suns*. This is also why some people who have had past-life memories sometimes have conflicting stories. It is very possible to have recollections of memories of distant relatives through the *ami* in addition to a completely different set of memories from the *suns*. It is sometimes possible for an individual to see the image of past lives in a mirror, especially in a shaman's mirror. Also, when a person dies, it is believed that the *suns* lingers around the place where it had lived for seven days. In some places it is a custom to scatter ashes or sand in front of the door on the seventh night after a death. In the morning the tracks of the *suns* are said to appear in the sand or ashes. Sometimes instead of human tracks there will be animal tracks, the tracks of an animal that the *suns* had occupied during a previous incarnation. Mongols and Siberians believe that sometimes the *suns* of a human being will occupy an animal body, and that sometimes an animal will reincarnate as a human.

This belief reinforces the strict customs surrounding treating animal remains with respect, and furthermore, if some human beings show rude and animal-like behavior, it may be because they had been animals in a previous life. Actually, animal souls are not considered in any way inferior to human souls, for animals are considered to be humanlike in personality and capable of experiencing emotions and communicating among each other, just as people do.⁴

The triad of souls that comprises the human being can be seen as a combination of essences from all three worlds. The *suld* is the most closely tied to this world because it lives no place else. The *ami* lives between earthly lives as a bird on the World Tree and is practically a being of the upper world. The *suns* is definitely a part of the lower world. Any one soul by itself is invisible except to shamans and other people with extrasensory perception. The need for multiple souls in order to be a visible physical entity implies that a physical living being represents an intersection of spirits from more than one of the three worlds.

The Siberian Circle of Life and the Water Cycle

While the *ami* soul is related to breath, the *suns* soul is tied to water. Waterways are passages for travel of the *suns* souls, especially the World River, which enters the middle world by the World Tree in the south and then flows into the lower world in the north. The direction of flow of the World River naturally parallels the great waterways of North Asia, which all feed into the Arctic Ocean. Like the constantly renewing flow of water of these great rivers, *suns* souls return to the earth again and again. A model has been developed out of the various myths that exist throughout Siberia that explains this process. According to this model, souls enter the world through the source of the World River by the World Tree, where Umai stands watch over the *ami* souls. The reincarnating souls come down the river and enter the infant at the time of birth. At death, the *suns* travels down the river to the Arctic Ocean and the entrance to the lower world while the *ami* takes the form of a bird and flies back to the World Tree. In order to return to this world the *suns* will either travel underground to the World River's source or travel along the Milky Way to the lands in the south where the upper and middle worlds touch.⁵

This cycle of life presents an interesting parallel to the water cycle, which generations of native peoples observing their environment could not have failed to understand to some degree. Water falls on the earth as rain and flows from the ground at springs (springs are considered a gateway to the lower world). It flows ultimately into the ocean, where evaporation raises water once more to the heavens so it can fall on earth again as rain. In the same way, human souls follow the World River to the sea, once more to emerge at its source in order to incarnate again.

Water is considered to be a special element for other reasons as well. The *lus*, the nature spirits of the waters, are very powerful and are invoked in shamanic rituals on certain days of the year. They are believed to be able to remove dangers and bad fortune. During rituals for the *lus* spirits water is mixed with milk, tea, and liquor and the *lus* will dissolve into the water the evil things in the life of the person being treated. The water is then thrown outside in a direction told to the shaman by the *lus* spirits. Water may also be imbued with spiritual power, and this empowered water is called *arshaan*. In Mongolia and Siberia some springs naturally produce *arshaan*, and it is used for many different ailments. Because of the presence of the spirits in the waters it is taboo to throw things into bodies of water, and the worst offense of all is to urinate into the water.

The chief of the *lus* spirits is Uha Loson, who is said to live in Lake Baikal. His daughter, Alma Mergen, being a patroness of war and hunting, resembles Artemis of Greek mythology. In Buryat mythology she is also a prototype for the shamaness and warrior woman and is able to shape shift and appear in different forms to hunters and warriors. Water is traditionally considered to be feminine in essence and is associated with the moon and the trait of *bilig*, wisdom.

Mongolian and Siberian Traditions about the Undead

There are many traditions among Siberians about corpses coming back to life because they have been taken over by a foreign spirit, such as a stray *suns* soul, or a nature spirit, a *burhan* or a *chotgor*. Some of the undead are said to be almost normal, while others are extremely abnormal and dangerous to human beings. Since in Mongolia and in many parts of Siberia corpses may be placed out in nature rather than buried, it is not surprising that a certain amount of them come up missing, and while certainly most, if not all, are taken by carrion-eating animals, there are many interesting stories about the undead.

The first type of undead entity is the *bug*, or *bong*. The majority of *bong* are female and are capable of having children if they marry or have sex. *Bong* are created when a disembodied *suns* or a *burhan* (nature spirit) comes into a corpse while it is still fresh and capable of being revived and its *ami* soul has not yet departed. While many *bong* are relatively normal and can pass as regular human beings, *bong* inhabited by a *burhan*, which is a very strong spirit, tend to act in a deranged manner. Most *bong* live out in the forest, surviving on badger meat and living in danger of being killed by dogs and wolves (animals that often eat corpses). *Bong* have long hair, which generally covers the third eye that they all have in their forehead. One Buryat legend tells of a very beautiful *bong* that married a prince and was executed when her true identity was discovered. Her revenge was giving tobacco to the world.⁶

A much more dangerous creature is the *ibagan*, a corpse inhabited by a *chotgor*. *Ibagan* have long hair covering their bodies and a vicious disposition. They are incapable of walking and can only jump, going in a straight line and grabbing everything in their way. Their mere touch is fatal to human beings. The only way to kill an *ibagan* is with an axe, and then the creature must be burned with all of its victims.⁷

Other Types of Spirits

There are several other types of spirits and spiritlike creatures that deserve mention. These are important because they also will appear from time to time both in nature and in shamanist practice. A fairly exhaustive listing of Mongolian terms for spirits, as well as spirit names in several other Siberian languages, can be found in the glossary. For the sake of brevity I shall mention only the most common types found in the Mongolian tradition.

The *endurs* are sky spirits, but unlike the *tenger* they have not always been upper-world spirits. *Endur* spirits are the *suns* souls of human beings who have led very good lives and have the choice of remaining free in nature rather than reincarnating. They are often said to reside in clouds. They are beneficial and helpful spirits, similar to angels in the European tradition.⁸

Ojan spirits are spirits left over from the creation of the world. According to legend, when the world was created, these spirits lived in the wastelands and have never incarnated as humans or animals. In general they are rather surly in character and can cause disease. They are also said to shoot arrows at the souls of shamans while they are journeying. The *ojan* are rather weak spirits, however, and can be prevented from attacking by doing *tsatsah* (ceremonial sprinkling of liquids) before rituals.⁹

The *almas* is a rather mysterious creature, and there is no agreement about whether it is a spirit or an actual animal. It is very similar to the Sasquatch of North America, a tall apelike creature that walks like a man. *Almas* are sighted every so often in Mongolia and Siberia, and many people believe that this creature actually lives as a real animal in the steppe and forests. Possibly the *almas* is or was a living descendant of one of the many hominid species that preceded human beings on Earth.

Chotgor come in many forms; for a full listing see the glossary. They are almost all *suns* souls that have not gone to the lower world to reincarnate. Some have consciously chosen not to reincarnate because they are unhappy with having died prematurely, while some have simply lost their way because they have been distracted by their family's grief. Sometimes souls in the lower world will travel up to this world because of curiosity about their relatives or other things important to them, and become lost as a result. In general all discarnate souls are capable of causing illness and stealing souls, even without such an intent. The most dangerous *chotgor*, however, are the *kut*, who are intentionally malevolent. *Chotgor* usually harass children, women, and people who have been traumatized by injury or surgery, in which case recovery is slow and difficult. *Chotgor* are generally afraid of light, yells, and violent movement, and these are used in shamanic techniques to drive them out of the bodies of sick people.

When Spirit and Earth Touch: Customs, Taboos, and *Ongons*

As stated earlier, the spirit and physical worlds are not really separated since they touch in many places. There are certain situations, however, where the spirit world and this world touch in dramatic ways that require special notice and that are regulated by specific rules of behavior. The worlds can touch in a person, such as in a shaman, a newborn, or a deceased individual. Physical

sites where spirit and earth touch are in sacred sites such as mountains, trees, or *oboo*, or in a specially devised dwelling place for a spirit called an *ongon*. Contact with spirits can be beneficial or detrimental depending on the type of spirit involved and its character. It can also present some danger to the well-being of a person's souls because they may be tempted to follow spirits into other worlds.

While contact with a shaman is normally quite safe because his spirits are employed for beneficial purposes, for other people, contact with the spirit world can be quite dangerous. Spirit possession or influence can cause illness or insanity and must be ended quickly. Newborn children and their mothers are sequestered for a certain amount of time following birth, not only to protect the newly entered souls of the child, but also because the entry of the souls through the mother makes her slightly otherworldly and dangerous to other humans. Similarly, the household of a person who has died becomes temporarily taboo. Those who disposed of the body are taboo as well because of their presence at the exit of souls from the world but this taboo does not extend to their families unless they happen to also be blood relatives of the person who died. According to Mongolian custom, only the pallbearers are present at the burial. The name of a dead person may remain taboo for a period of time lasting from a few days to forever. It is believed that the mention of the dead person's name may call him or her back from the lower world or cause him or her to stay around. This is dangerous because dead people may try to take the *suns* souls of the ones they loved.

Spiritually powerful places in nature require respect of the spirits that dwell there. Insults to the spirits can result in their attack on the offending person or his community. On the other hand, honoring the spirits of these places brings good luck and prosperity.

An important site of contact between spirits and the physical world is the *ongon*, a specially created house for spirits. *Ongons* are beneficial as long as they are treated with honor. *Ongons* are some of the most important shamanist tools in Mongolia and Siberia, and almost all tribes use them. They come in many different forms; they can be carved out of wood, painted on leather, mounted on a wooden hoop, or made out of metal. The materials used to make *ongons* include wood, leather, felt, rocks, paper, fur, feathers, straw, and metal. Some *ongons* are abstract and some resemble dolls. While ordinary people may make an *ongon*, it is enlivened by the shaman who calls the spirit to occupy it. Ancestor spirits or animal spirits occupy most *ongons*, but some contain very powerful nature spirits. Some *ongon* spirits are the *suld* souls of people who died tragically and have been called and mastered by shamans in order to heal their unhappiness and direct their energies into helping people. Many of these spirits had been unhappy because they were unable to have children, and thus by becoming *ongon* spirits they are adopted as virtual ancestors. Other *ongons* house the *suld* souls of shamans whose souls have not become *udha* spirits or *zayaans*.¹⁰



Ongons

After being quickened, an *ongon* is honored by being placed in the sacred place of the *ger* and fed offerings of liquor, blood, milk, or fat. Some tribes place *ongons* outside or in a special house. Buryats put some *ongons* inside poles that are placed on hilltops in order to watch over the land and animals. The Dagur Mongols place their *ongons* in a special building separate from their dwelling because they believe that some *ongon* spirits become angry if people have sex in their presence.¹¹

Ongons are ritually fed, some daily, and some on special occasions. If the *ongons* fail to perform their duties, such as by not bringing prosperity or protection, a household may “punish” them by not giving them offerings. Some *ongons*, especially those of Zol Zayaach and Umai, have decorations added to them as a way of expressing thanks for their help. Dagur Mongols give

their *ongons* feathers to help them fly during their journeys in the spirit world. Since most *ongon* spirits have lived as humans or animals in the past, they are believed to have humanlike emotions and memories, and so they are treated with respect. If in a future time a spirit is no longer useful or desired, the *ongon* is either burned respectfully or placed out in nature so that the spirit can return to the natural world from which it had been called.¹²

Any spirit can be represented by one or more *ongons* that may be present in multiple places. This is usually related to how well an *ongon* spirit is known or recognized to be powerful. For example, a certain departed person may be housed in an *ongon* and used as a household protector or as a helper of a certain shaman; if the spirit often reveals itself to shamans or seems to have special magical powers, additional *ongons* may be made for it, depending on the needs of certain individuals or shamans. There are many recorded cases of this happening in various parts of Mongolia and Siberia. Many of the *ongon* spirits were real historical persons and the cult of honoring them usually spread from their own families or villages to other areas over time, as people came to understand what their special powers were. Some *ongon* spirits may be good for protection, health of the livestock, hunting luck, assistance in lower world travel, safety from floods, and so forth. The fact that the spirit can be present and exert its effects through the *ongons* in many places at once is rooted in the basic idea in Mongolian shamanism that time and space are irrelevant in the spiritual world—all *ongons* of any given spirit are part of one whole rather than functioning as many separate entities.

Two of the most important *ongons* found in Mongolian households are Zol Zayaach and Avgaldai. Zol Zayaach is depicted as a male-female pair and is a protector of the household and herds; Avgaldai is a copper mask of the bear ancestor and is occasionally worn by a shaman in the triennial *ominan* ritual that honors all of the spirits and initiates new shamans. Shamans normally have a large set of *ongons* that house their helper spirits; in fact, the shaman costume itself is like an *ongon* of the shaman's *udha* spirit. Special *ongons* may be created for healing and soul-retrieval ceremonies and left with a patient in order to carry on the healing process and protect the patient's souls. Temporary *ongons* of wood or grass are sometimes used in rituals to hold a disease spirit. These temporary *ongons* are usually made in the form of a man or a dog. The spirit thus held is then released when the *ongon* is discarded out in nature or afterwards destroyed. *Ongons* of shamanic helper spirits are passed down from generation to generation because the spirit will continue to live in them, and neglect of the spirit may make it turn hostile.¹³

Many Siberian tribes also have a tradition of making animal *ongons*, usually horses or reindeer. The animal will be marked by a ribbon or *hadag* (ceremonial silk scarf) passed through the ear or tied on the mane. This custom is known as *seterleh*. These living *ongons* are usually created at the time of some major shamanic ritual, and they cannot be killed afterwards. Some tribes also forbid that the animals be ridden, while some allow only men to ride them. In a similar way a tree may become an *ongon* as well (see directions for a special peace-tree ritual in chapter 8), but many times these *ongon modon* (*ongon* trees) will already be recognized as possessing powerful spirits before they are consecrated. A tree chosen for consecration as a prayer tree usually has some unusual physical characteristic that is understood as an omen that the tree is connected to the spirit world.

Shamanic Helper Spirits

Not surprisingly, the term *ongon* is commonly used to describe the shaman's helper spirits. In Mongolian the shaman's calling of his helper spirits is called *ongon duudah*, "calling the *ongons*." The arrival of the spirits is called *ongod buuh*, "the coming down of the *ongons*." Most significantly, when the shaman goes into ecstasy, it is said he or she is *ongod olood*, "having the *ongons* inside the body." In many ways the shaman is like a human *ongon* for the spirits that he uses in his work, but only during ecstasy. In other times the spirits will be around him but not inside his body.

The most important type of *ongon* spirit, known as the *udha*, follows shaman lineages and becomes like an extra soul as well as guide for the shaman. It does not incarnate in a shaman's body but is a carrier of the collective memories of all the shamans that it has been associated with in the past. This collective memory is called the *sunsii mur*, the "trail of the spirit." An *udha* spirit may start out as a shaman ancestor but after the original shaman of the lineage dies it attaches itself to shamans-to-be, bringing on the initiatory vision.¹⁴

Other common names for the shaman helper spirits are *onggor* and *sahius*. *Sahius* spirits are generally equivalent to *ongon* spirits, but this term is also used for the free-ranging spirits and *suld* souls in nature that can be invoked for assistance in a shaman's work or for enlivening *ongons*. At times the term *sahius* is also used to refer to the *udha* spirit. Significantly, a shaman's medicine bag is referred to as a *sahius*. These bags are usually carried on the shaman's person and contain various herbs, rocks, crystals, and other power objects important to the shaman, and are dwelling places for the *udha* spirit.

A higher ranking shaman helper spirit is known as the *zayaan*; they are the *suld* souls of powerful shamans as well as upper-world spirits that help shamans. *Zayaans* are associated with the four directions like the *tenger*. Their name is related to the word *zayaa*, which means "fortune" or "fate." They are believed to generally have a desire to bring good things to mankind and are for that reason invoked for assistance by the shaman. *Zayaans* are not usually settled into *ongons* but are rather invoked as needed.

The most powerful spirits that help shamans are the *tenger* and *khans*. The *tenger* and *khan* spirits are upper-world spirits. *Ongons* are not generally made for the *khan* spirits, but some *tenger* will enliven *ongons*. These *ongons* are the most powerful of all. Like the *tenger*, the *khans* are associated with the four directions, but they are considered to be of a lesser rank than the *tenger*. In the elaborate genealogy of Buryat shamanism the *khans* are largely the children and grandchildren of the *tenger*; although some, like Chinggis Khan and Anda Bars, had actually lived as humans in the past. Buryats sometimes refer to the *khans* as *sahius* as well.

Spirit Travel: The World in the Eyes of Spirit

The world appears very different to the shaman who journeys in spirit. For one thing, almost every assumption about what is normal in physical reality is shattered in the strange and fascinating world of the shaman. The most dramatic difference from ordinary reality is that time and space are distorted; indeed the concepts of time and space as reflected in the shamanic experience seem to touch on higher dimensions. As discussed in chapter 1, time is seen to be cyclical, so tightly bound upon itself that when the shaman stands in the virtual center of the world he is in touch with all time. As one Mongol has said, "There is no time in shamanism." Furthermore, all places in existence are also in intimate touch with the world center, and the shaman can travel tremendous distances or communicate over long distances instantaneously. One interesting fact connected with this ability is that it is especially effective when the weather is calm and clear. Therefore a shaman can actually work on a person from a great distance away, and some can even change a course of events after it has happened by directing the shaman work to a time prior to the events. The only limitation on the shaman is that he or she cannot know what the outcome is until after the work is finished.¹⁵

Another fascinating aspect of spirit travel is that one's sense of size may become distorted. A shaman may become as big as a mountain, like Baglain Shaman, who stood with her feet on two different mountain peaks in the Mongolian Hangai Mountains. Many times the shaman may become small, as small as an insect or even smaller, and the things that are seen in the spirit journey may seem different from what they are. For example, hair may look like trees or a few drops of water may appear like a lake. In my own experience, one time I found myself in the midst of a great but unusual forest, only to realize that I was looking at the pile of the carpet I was sitting on! For this reason the shamanic traditions have a lot more knowledge of the microscopic world than would be possible from seeing with physical eyes.¹⁶

In the spiritual world things that normally are solid may appear as transparent, and spiritual phenomena such as the souls and spirit intrusions will be immediately visible. This is especially important for shamans' work with healing and soul retrieval. To a shaman's eyes, the helper spirits may be as visible as physical entities. Shamans' perceptions of how these beings appear, however, may vary from shaman to shaman and even from journey to journey by the same shaman.

This leads to another interesting characteristic of shamans' journeying. Shamans are capable of shape shifting. In some cases a shaman and his or her drum and staffs may be transformed into various animals. Commonly shamans will travel as birds and sometimes as foxes as well. Naturally, as the shaman assumes these various shapes, his or her perceptions of the world will change according to the size and nature of the creature that the shaman has become. As an

animal, a shaman will be especially perceptive of the humanlike character of animals and the way they communicate with each other. In any case, flight and other such travel is usually much faster than it is under normal physical conditions. I recall doing a fire ritual in Ulan-Ude that one of my teachers was attending but not participating in, just watching. Even though he did not shamanize, his spirits were in and around him. Suddenly he disappeared, much to my surprise, at the very time I was doing a healing procedure. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a huge grayish blue wolf bitch appear, and she loped back and forth behind the people watching the ritual, her bright yellow eyes sparkling, her tongue hanging out of her mouth, and her breath steaming in the minus-thirty-degree weather. No one else seemed to see her, but she was as real as anything else there, even though she was much larger than any wolf I had ever seen. Then, just as suddenly as she appeared, the wolf disappeared, and there stood my shaman friend, gazing calmly with a mysterious smile on his face. While I never asked him about it, I had no doubt that he had taken on the form of one of his power animals in order to test me.

During shamans' journeys time is often distorted, and a journey that appears to take hours or even days may actually take only a short time in ordinary reality, perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes. Conversely, when the *ongon* spirits enter the shaman a long time will pass while in the shaman's subjective reality it seems to have lasted but a few minutes. I have experienced doing rituals that seemed in my own perception to have lasted an hour at most only to find out that as much as six hours had passed. This may be the reason why ethnographers in the past have been astounded at the endurance of shamans who have been able to drum and dance for hours on end without becoming exhausted in spite of being encumbered by heavy drums and shamanic regalia.

The experiences of a shaman during spirit travel show that reality is a good deal more complex than our normal physical senses reveal. While shamanic experiences are subjective and vary from shaman to shaman, the common characteristics described in these last few paragraphs imply that shamans touch on certain aspects of reality that modern science has only started to grasp. Physical sensing is known even by scientists to record only a small part of what is actually going on in the universe, and a lot of the things that shamans see during their travels are consistent with certain scientific theories, such as that of parallel reality, multiple dimensions, and the uncertainty principle. The shape shifting of the shaman during the journey reflects the human experience, for the journey of life is itself a series of metamorphoses no less dramatic than those of the shaman during his travels. In the exercise that follows, a shamanic practitioner can further discover a new view of reality according to the principles of Mongolian and Siberian shamanism.

Exercise: Visualization of the Spiritual Body

This visualization may or may not be done in the context of a shamanic ritual. It is a very important visualization because it will acquaint you with the structure of the spirit body according to Mongolian/Siberian shamanist principles. Once you are familiar with this practice, it will enable you to recognize disturbances and abnormalities within your own spiritual energy field that could be a sign of impending illness or spirit interference or intrusion. You will also have the ability to recognize normal and abnormal states in the spiritual energy field of others, which is very important for diagnosing illness and soul loss (see "The Dalbuur Ritual" at the end of chapter 5 as an example).

The only preparation you need for this visualization is the ability to bring yourself into deep meditation or trance. This can be done with the assistance of drumming if that works well for you. It is best if you are standing or sitting for this exercise. You may find that closing your eyes or working in darkness can be helpful when doing this exercise for the first time.

Bring yourself into a deep meditative or trancelike state. Visualize that you are floating free, that all the walls and confines around you have simply melted away and you stand in a sphere of pure blue light, blue like the sky on a clear day. Yet this vast blue expanse is not empty. You feel an energy flowing through your body, upward from Mother Earth below you and downward from Father Heaven above. You are like a tree, drawing nourishment from below and light from above. The blue that enfolds you is the light of the eternal blue heaven.

Within this field you will recognize two points of light, one white and one red, both starlike. The white star rests lightly upon the top of your head; it is the point of contact between Father Heaven and your soul sphere. It will continue to shine strongly and clearly as long as you keep your spiritual body clean and remember and respect your connection to Tenger. The red starlike

point of light is in your chest. This point of light represents your windhorse. The strength with which it shines is proportionate to the amount of windhorse you have; if you live a life in balance, doing good for others and calling *buyan* into your life, your windhorse will be strong. This will also keep your psychic powers strong, and you will be able to fully utilize the spiritual powers of your souls for perception and travel.

Now become aware of the vertical axis running down the length of your body, parallel with the spinal column. The top end of the axis ends where the star of contact with Tenger rests upon your head, and the bottom of it is just beyond the base of the spine. Visualize this axis as being a board with seven holes in it. These holes are the seven chakras, the root, genital, solar plexus, heart, throat, third eye, and crown chakras. At the top of the axis a sphere of light rests at the crown of the head next to the star of contact with Father Heaven. This sphere of white light is your *suld* soul, the seat of your individual and unique personality.

You will now notice that the axis of your soul sphere and its holes are not empty; rather, there are two smaller spheres of white light pulsing up and down the length of the axis. They pass in and out of the holes, up and down like a sine-wave pattern. Can you feel the speed at which they travel up and down the body? The speed of their oscillation is directly related to the heartbeat. When the heart beats faster, they will circulate faster. These two rapidly moving points of light are the *ami* and *suns* souls. When the body is healthy they will move up and down in a regular and smooth pattern. If their movement seems to be disrupted in some way it is a sign of spirit intrusion and you should locate and remove the intrusion.

Relax and allow yourself to feel the rhythms of the souls' movements, and look at the three spheres of light in your chest and head. As you become accustomed to this rhythm, extend your consciousness outward. How does the oscillation of your souls relate to the movement of energy going up through you from below and coming down from above? You will find that nurturing and empowering currents of energy surround you. Now look further out and contemplate the sphere of heavenly blue light that envelops you. This sphere is at the center of the world; here you are in touch with all times and all places. This is the secret of your ability to see and to travel as a shaman.

This sphere is not small, but infinitely large within an infinitely large universe. If you doubt this fact, allow yourself to fly within this sphere, and you will find that the blueness stretches out in all directions. If you so wish, and if your windhorse is strong, you can touch, see, and travel to any place that your heart desires from here. If you wonder how there can be an infinitely large area inside one's own soul sphere, it is because you are actually touching higher dimensions while doing this exercise. Explore and enjoy the experience for as long as you like!

You may find that this visualization will radically change the way you view other people, for indeed every person has this undiscovered universe within their own spiritual body. Very few people besides shamans ever fully understand it. An understanding of it, however, is essential for many Siberian and Mongolian healing techniques. When you see other people, try to visualize the three souls within their own spiritual bodies. Over time, with some practice, you will be able to see or feel these souls in other people, and you will be able to detect soul disruption or loss quite readily. When examining the souls of other people you may find that squinting your eyes, using a mirror, or running your hand along the length of the body of the person you are examining can aid in sensing the three souls.

Doing this visualization from time to time is also a good way to keep connected with the energies you are receiving from heaven and earth and to examine your own spiritual health. It is also invigorating and inspiring to be reminded of the wonders of this small but infinite world inside all of us.



The Mongolian shamaness Sumiyaa Tserendorj.

Chapter 4

The Shaman

Where was the land of Barguzin-Tukum?
If not in our country, then where?
The mountains turn green, the larches rustle,
Will the rivers flowing to Baikal be silent?
In the mists of legend, in the voice of the wind
In the song of the moon I sought my answer.
I found it deep in my mind.
The earth quaking below, the trees swaying above
Told of when the Buryats first appeared.
They trod down the fresh green grass in the light of the campfires
The snowy peaks rising beyond the clouds
As they danced a majestic yohor dance.
My wise shaman ancestor
While drumming to the ongon spirits
Sang these golden words with hoomei
While sitting and singing his shaman song.

—Bayar Dugarov, “Barguzin-Tukum,”
from *Khaan Uula*, translation by the author



Referring to the spirituality of Mongolia and Siberia as shamanism is somewhat misleading, because a shaman is not someone revered but rather someone respected because of his special relationship with the spirits. Some scholars have taken to calling this traditional religion Tengrism, which is more appropriate because worship is centered on Tenger and the spirits. Everyday religious practices honoring the spirits do not require a shaman; only when his powers are needed to restore balance or heal illness will a shaman be called for assistance. In ancient times many Siberian and Mongolian groups recognized the shaman as both the political and spiritual leader of the community; only after the time of Chinggis Khan and the conquering of Siberia by the Russians did the shamans become separated from their roles as community leaders.

Several words are used to describe shamanic powers. These words include *ab*, *huch*, *tsog*, *ilbe*, *id*, and *shid*. *Ilbe*, *id*, and *shid* roughly are equivalent to magical powers and may involve the use of magical formulas or spells (*tarni*). A shaman capable of doing magic is often described as *id shidtei*. *Ab*, *huch*, and *tsog* do not require *tarni*; they are the powers directly accessible to the shaman, but are greatly increased with the assistance of the shamanic helper spirits. *Ab* is the power to do miraculous deeds; *huch* is personal strength, both physical as well as spiritual; *tsog* is closely related to the concept of *hiimori*, and like windhorse determines the extent of the shaman's psychic abilities. *Tsog* is visualized as being like fire, sparks, or lightning and can often be seen in the eyes. For this reason many people consider looking a shaman in the eye to be dangerous.

Some tribes have more than one type of shaman, and in some groups the different shamans are ranked by their power. For instance the Nanai have *surinku* shamans who simply do healing work, *ningmaney* shamans who do healings and funerals, and the most powerful, the *kasatey* shamans, who do psychopomp work. Among many Mongolian groups, as well as among the Altai, shamans are differentiated as white or black depending on what spirits they use and where they travel. White shamans are associated with the upper world and work more with the western *tenger*, whereas black shamans do more lower-world work and derive their power from the eastern *tenger*. "White" and "black" here do not necessarily mean good and evil, and it is a mistake to consider white shamanism as being any more beneficial than black shamanism. The Buryat scholar and shaman D. S. Dugarov believes that white shamanism and black shamanism represent two separate shamanist traditions dating back to ancient times. Among the southernmost Mongolian groups, such as the Dagur, shamans work alongside other shamanlike practitioners, such as bonesetters and other folk doctors, some of whom also have helper spirits. Many groups have only one kind of shaman who is capable of doing the work of white or black shamans as well as folk doctors. For the sake of simplicity, this type of shaman will be the model described in this chapter.¹

Becoming a Shaman

Shamans are distinguished from other people in that they have a shaman spirit that selects and initiates them. This spirit is known by different names, including *udha*, *sahius*, and *ongon* among the Buryats and Mongols, and by many other names in other Siberian languages. It acts like an extra soul, is a source of power, and controls the shaman's encounters with other spirits, some of which may also become helper spirits. While a shaman may show a proclivity for shamanizing from an early age, the *udha* (I use the Buryat term for simplicity) will manifest itself suddenly, resulting in mental or physical illness. This illness usually comes on in one's late teens or early twenties and may be quite traumatic; often it will be some sort of mental disorder and the shaman-to-be may run off into the forest or show other unusual behavior. During the course of the illness the shaman-to-be will have a vision in which the *udha* will initiate him. Common elements in the vision include travel to the upper world and the dismemberment and reassembly of the shaman's body so that it will be new and empowered for his work.

When the new shaman falls ill, the shaman who then examines him will recognize at once that an *udha* spirit has selected him. At that point if he agrees to become a shaman he can be healed; otherwise he may die. The training and initiation that follow his recovery are only a confirmation of the initiation that he experienced in the spirit world. After recovering from the initiatory illness many shamans will retreat into the forest for a period of time to drum alone and develop the power songs that they will use during their work. Additional visions will further empower the shaman and develop his relationship with the spirit family that will accompany him and aid him in his work. This is in many ways similar to the vision quest of Native American traditions. An example of this is described in the Buryat myth of Geser, where the hero climbs to the top of Mount Sumer (another symbol for the World Tree or world axis) to pray to Etseg Malaan Tenger. His body is

transformed and he receives the tools for his work and is given a magic horse on which he can fly between the worlds (a metaphor for the shaman's drum).

The shaman will also usually have some training from an elder shaman, in order to learn the large number of rituals, healing techniques, and songs. While there are some forty or so rituals in the Mongolian shaman's practice, each shaman will usually adapt the rituals according to directions from his spirits, and there are slight variations in how they are performed among various shamans. When the new shaman is ready for the formal public initiation, his family and community members usually work together to make a new costume, headdress, and drum as well as other implements he may need. The initiation ritual of a shaman was commonly a days-long affair involving several rituals. The novice shaman would perform the rituals with an elder shaman, who may test his newly acquired skills. During the shamanic initiation, a turge tree would be erected, and one or both of the shamans would make an upper-world journey while climbing up nine branches of the tree. Since the persecution of shamanism by Communists, the large public initiation rituals have become a thing of the past. Today people who become shamans are recognized by their calling and by the spiritual initiation of the spirits, which were always the chief requirements for becoming a shaman. As in the past, people in the community that the shaman serves may prepare his implements, but the time is yet to come when the great communal initiations will be revived.²

Types of Shamanic Work

Shamanic work is commonly referred to in Mongolian as *zasal*, "repair," and the duties of a shaman include healing, blessing, protection, hunting magic, and occasionally weather magic. Some rituals such as the *oboo* ceremony and *ominan* ritual are elaborate and are meant to promote the welfare of the entire community. Shamans' work may vary from simple fortune-telling to grand rituals lasting several days. Depending on the difficulty of the task, a shaman may invoke his spirits to help him or actually to enter his body when more power is needed. Shamans usually sing, drum, and dance during performances. Some rituals, however, are very simple and require neither drumming, costume, nor altered states.

Most shamanic ceremonies include one or several of the following basic elements: *tsatsah*; libations (poured on the ground); smudging; the lighting of lights; daubing with blood or other liquids; piling stones; smudging with sacred smoke; making offerings; eating or drinking consecrated food; bowing, walking, or dancing in a circle; creating obstructions to evil influences; worshipping at sacred trees; tying ribbons or hair to sacred objects; positioning the parts of a meat sacrifice; whistling; crying; praying; performing *dallaga*; and making invocations and calls to repel or summon supernatural powers.³

Healing

Healing is the most basic form of shamanic work because spirits are the cause of illness and the shaman's relationship with the spirit world makes him or her capable of healing illness. Many shamans also have some knowledge of bonesetting and herb lore, but in many communities folk doctors, known as *bariach*, will set broken or dislocated bones. Interestingly, many *bariach* are said to inherit a spirit similar to the *udha* and may do a little shamanizing, although they are not recognized outright as being shamans. Healing and theories of illness are discussed at greater length in chapter 5.

Protection and Blessing

Spirits can also be called to provide protection and improve luck. The spirits that are most frequently invoked for protection and improving luck are the *lus* (water spirits) and *sahius* (nature spirits). While all the spirits are honored in these rituals, it is common for one of these nature spirits to remain with the person on whose behalf the ritual was performed. Protection rituals are usually done at propitious times according to the shamanist calendar.

In especially urgent situations a direct appeal to Father Heaven may be done in the *tengeriin tahilga*. These rituals are usually private affairs done on behalf of one family. The ritual may involve sacrifice of an animal, if the spirits direct the shaman to do so. In such a case the head and skin of the animal will be placed on a pole or tree so that the eyes are looking toward the sky.

Rituals to bring blessing to entire communities are often performed at *oboos*, also according to dates in the ritual calendar. Among the Buryats a *serge*, a sort of temporary *oboo* made from a cut tree, may be used. The *dallaga* ritual may be performed by the shaman or collectively to bring

buyanhishig into the community. In such cases each participant will use a bag that contains some food, money, and juniper that will then be offered to the spirits at the sacred place in the home. During the ritual the bag will be waved sunwise while pronouncing the words “*hurai, hurai, hurai*” as the shaman sings and drums.

In order to improve luck a ritual may be done to honor Zol Zayaach, the spirit of luck. If one does not have an *ongon* for this spirit a new *ongon* may be created and imbued with the essence of Zol Zayaach so that it will be an ongoing presence and source of good fortune for the family. The *ongon* will be decorated with bones or beads whenever a good thing happens from that time onward.⁴

Fire rituals are the most common rituals in the Mongolian shamanist repertoire and can be applied to many different situations, including protection, blessing, or healing. Fire is the home of a powerful female spirit, Golomt Eej, as well as a meeting place between heaven and earth similar to an *oboo*. Fire is also a purifier and the flame and smoke are used for many different healing techniques.

Rituals to Invoke the Forces of Nature

Hunting-magic rituals put the shaman in touch with the animal and nature spirits who provide or withhold game. In many Siberian communities the shaman is actually not allowed to participate in the hunt, but he or she can prepare for the hunt by calling the spirits who affect the behavior of the animals. These spirits include Bayan Ahaa and Anda Bars among the Mongols. Bayan Ahaa is honored by carving his face into the bark of a birch tree, while Anda Bars is housed in *ongons*. When hunting luck is bad, the shaman may communicate with the spirits of the animals to find out what the reason may be. In most cases the cause is a member of the community who has broken one of the taboos regarding the proper disposal of animal remains, thereby offending the animal spirits.

Other things that offend the spirits controlling hunting are injuring animals without killing them, killing animals in an inhumane way or by striking them on the head, or by polluting the forest or waters with trash. Once the offended spirits are satisfied, usually with some sort of food or drink offering, they will allow for success in the hunt.

Weather magic usually involves rainmaking, stopping storms, or sending lightning back to the sky, and requires direct contact with the sky spirits (*tenger*). The bezoar (*zadai*) stone, a smooth shiny stone that is found in the stomachs of some animals, is considered to be a source of power for rainmaking rituals. *Zadai* stones can also be used for stopping storms; the Buryat hero Geser is said to have a “*zadai* to stop a thousand storms.”

If rain is needed it is customary to pray to Father Heaven, often at *oboos*. Good shamans will bring rain very quickly. Recently a Buryat shaman doing a rainmaking ritual called a storm out of the clear blue sky, bringing a hard rain that sent everyone running for cover about twenty minutes into the ritual; the downpour lasted for six hours! Another rainmaking technique involves invoking Bukhe Beligte Tenger and throwing water with a ritual spoon (*tsatsal*).

In Siberia and Mongolia there are violent electrical storms during the warm months, and it is not surprising that the very real danger of grass and forest fires has resulted in rituals to stop or moderate storms as well as to neutralize the effects of lightning. Lightning, while itself considered spiritually potent and a point of contact with Tenger (lightning-struck objects are shamanically powerful), is considered unlucky if it strikes a house or livestock. It is interpreted as a sign of disfavor from Father Heaven and a ritual is necessary to send the lightning back to heaven and propitiate Tenger’s anger. Storms may be stopped by calling the *tenger* of the four directions or Tatai Tenger, who controls violent weather.⁵

Working with the Spirits of the Dead

There are four different kinds of work that shamans do with the spirits of the dead. The first is working with the souls of dead people who are still in this world. The second is sending the souls of the dead to the lower world. The third is traveling to the lower world and meeting with the soul of a dead person for some purpose. The last is bringing the soul of one who has died back to this world. In general, working with the souls of the dead is best left to shamans; it is fraught with dangers, including illness and soul loss, for those who do not have the abilities and helper spirits who protect shamans during this sort of work.

Managing souls of the dead in this world depends on what kind of soul is involved. *Suld* souls remain in this world, so they can be handled in a few different ways. In cases where the shaman wants to communicate with the *suld* soul of a dead person it can be done through his or her

clairvoyant abilities. Generally this is not done very much because calling the *suld* of an individual might also attract the *suns* from the lower world. Students of deceased shamans will, however, consult their teachers for advice and assistance. Some *suld* souls may be settled into *ongons* so that they may serve as helper spirits. In other cases, usually after funerals, the shaman will do a ritual to ensure that the *suld* of the deceased will find a good place to occupy in nature and reside in harmony with the other nature spirits.

Of the other two souls, the *suns* more commonly gets stuck in the middle world than does the *ami*. There is no clear explanation for this; perhaps it is because the *ami* is more concerned with bodily function and is not as emotionally attached to its most recent incarnation. In my own experience as a shaman, I have not seen a single case of an *ami* soul of a dead person remaining in the middle world; they seem to travel to the upper world quite easily and willingly. When the *ami* leaves the body prematurely, that is, while a person is still alive, it always lingers in the middle world and is relatively easy to find.

Suns souls can be quite troublesome, lingering around their former families and causing illness or confusion, sometimes soul loss. Even when they have gone to the lower world they will sometimes come back and wander around the middle world, especially if the scene of their death was remarkable in some way, or if the person's family is thinking too much about them. *Suns* souls are the cause of most cases of hauntings.

For this reason one of the important duties of a shaman is psychopomp work, the sending of *suns* souls to the lower world. In most cases, once the *suns* soul is shown the way to the lower world, it will continue on its own, as in the *dalbuur* ritual described at the end of chapter 5. If a *suns* soul is very stubborn, a shaman may have to struggle with it and use helper spirits to compel it to return to the lower world. In such cases it may be necessary to make an offering of drink or food to placate the unhappy soul after its departure.

In one case in my own experience I had quite a struggle with a spirit in Mongolia. After using a sword to scare the spirit away from the woman he was making ill, I trapped him in a corner using the sword and two *ongons*. The woman turned and looked at where the spirit was and made the mistake of mentioning the dead man's name. Suddenly the spirit kicked the sword and *ongons* away and flew right back to her! I had to work together with another shaman in order finally to subdue and send away that wild spirit.

The work that shamans consider to be the most advanced and dangerous is lower-world journeying in order to meet with or bring back *suns* souls. All lower-world journeying for this purpose needs the help and protection of the assisting spirits. In most cases the *dolbor* ritual is used. When shamans go to the lower world to meet with the soul of a dead person it is usually with the purpose of getting information. More often, however, when the shaman goes to the lower world to find a *suns* soul, it is in order to retrieve a soul that has prematurely left while a person is still alive. The shaman will absorb the soul temporarily into his or her own body or into an *ogon* or mirror for the return journey.

Sacrifices and Propitiations

Before discussing sacrifices, I wish to emphasize that I do not personally endorse, or for that matter oppose, the use of sacrifices in a shamanic context. For one thing, in Mongolia and Siberia, due to a climate and ecology not conducive to farming, the eating of meat is required for survival. Also, when animals are killed, it is with great respect paid to the animal's spirit. The thoughtless slaughter of animals as practiced in "civilized" countries is as abhorrent to the Mongol or native Siberian as to any vegetarian. That said, when sacrifices are made, they are done with a sense of great respect both for the animal and for the spirit(s) being honored, and the meat is used afterward to feed people in the community where the animal was sacrificed.

In certain cases the shaman will have an animal killed for a shamanic ceremony. The difference between sacrifice and propitiation is that a sacrifice is an act of generosity and gratitude toward spirits that have brought good things to the sacrificer and perhaps also to his community. Propitiations, on the other hand, are a sort of spiritual bribe used to assuage the anger of a hostile spirit or to convince it to go away or leave a person alone. In most cases the animal that is killed is a sheep, goat, cow, horse, or deer. Edible animals are preferred since in most cases once the meat has been presented to the spirits in order for them to partake of the essence of the animal, a token portion of the animal will be burned and the rest will be eaten by the participants in the ritual.

Sacrifices, especially *tailagans*, are times of celebration and are generally community affairs. Propitiations are usually private and solemn ceremonies, and it is considered preferable for the entire animal to be consumed before the people who gathered for the ritual leave. In most cases the meat is boiled, sometimes roasted. During the ritual itself, the parts of the animal that have been butchered and cooked will be reassembled so that it will be as it was when it was alive. Once the shaman has presented the animal to the spirits the meat may be eaten. It is customary in most Mongolian and Siberian tribes to put the skin of the sacrificed animal on a pole pointing toward heaven so that Tenger and all the spirits will be reminded of it. Instead of being put on a pole, skins of animals killed for propitiation are sometimes burned with some of the meat.

A Shaman's Tools

Shamans use several different tools in their work. In addition to the costume and drum, most shamans use mirrors, staffs, and *ongons*. Other tools used by Siberian and Mongolian shamans, but not by all, are the *dalbuur*, a type of fan, whips for the spirit animals used during the journey, and musical instruments, the most common one being the Jew's harp.

Clothing

A shaman may wear ordinary clothing or a specialized costume for doing his or her work. In my own experience, most shamans prefer wearing traditional clothing even for everyday wear, probably because shamans do have the role of being preservers of traditional culture. Even those shamans who wear Russian clothing in nonshamanic contexts will usually wear ethnic clothing for rituals not requiring going into an ecstatic state. For more elaborate rituals involving drumming, dancing, and journeying, most shamans will wear some type of ritual costume. The costume is usually made by the shaman's family and other members of the community he serves. The costume houses the spirits that come to the shaman during ecstasy and is therefore, functionally, like an *ongon*. Full-length shaman costumes are usually made of caribou hide, worn over regular clothing, and tied in back. Like Native American dance costumes, the arms and hem are usually adorned with buckskin fringe. The fringe is symbolic of feathers, for the shaman will fly like an eagle while journeying. Dozens of conical bells are attached to the costume so that every movement of the shaman will be accompanied by their jingling.



Mongolian shamaness in full ceremonial costume.

The sound of the bells during the shaman dance complements the beat of the drum in propelling the shaman to ecstasy. Small animal skins and cloth "snakes" hang in bunches from both shoulders in the back and also adorn the front of the costume. Metal or cloth appliques may be sewn on the costume to represent the arm bones and ribs, a reminder of the dismemberment experience shamans frequently have during their initiatory vision. Other metal pendants represent helper spirits, power animals, spiritual weapons, and other symbols. A commonly used pendant represents an antler with smaller pendants of fish and birds hanging from it, while another is a miniature bow and arrow. Metal mirrors, or *toli*, are also attached to some shaman costumes.

The overall appearance of the costume resembles somewhat the body of a bird; the fringe hanging from the arms is like feathers from wings, and the snakes hanging down are like a tail. This is not coincidental. The journeying of the shaman is visualized as flying. There are some dances in which the arms of the shaman will be extended like wings to imitate the flight of the eagle. Among the

Tungus, two types of shaman costumes are recognized, the duck costume and the reindeer costume. The duck costume is the costume of the novice shaman and is the more birdlike. As the costume increases in its ornamentation and magical power and as the shaman increases in his own power and experience, it will eventually be recognized as a reindeer costume, the costume of the elder shaman.⁶

The shaman's robe described above is found with little variation in style throughout Mongolia and Siberia. Some shamans use a somewhat abbreviated version of the robe called a *dudig* in Mongolian. It lacks arms and is made from one piece of hide with a hole in the center for the head and long flaps hanging down the front and back with strings tied on the sides to secure it. The edges of the *dudig* are fringed, and the bells, pendants, and snake tassels are attached to it just as on the shaman robe. Some shamans favor this variation of the shaman robe because it can be easily rolled up and stuffed inside the drum between performances.



Traditional Buryat shaman clothing with antlered headdress. Figure by Buryat artist Darima Batorova.

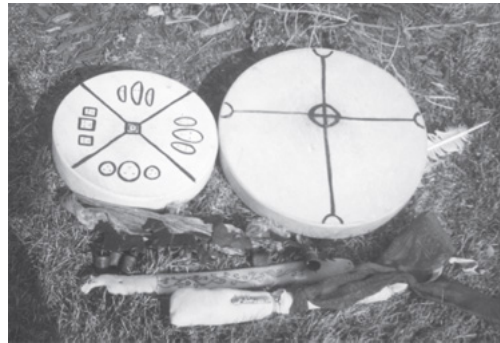
The headdress has two basic forms, the feathered bonnet and the iron headband with antlers. They are both referred to in Mongolian as *amidai*, "living thing," for they are believed to house spirits. The feathered headdress usually uses eagle feathers, although some Tuvan shamans will use a raven-feather headdress for lower-world journeys. These headdresses greatly resemble Native American feather bonnets and are adorned with beadwork and bunches of conical bells. The beadwork or embroidery often depicts a face on the front of the headdress, the eyes, nose, mouth, and ears representing the senses of the spirits that come into the shaman. The Tungus, as well as many Buryat clans, use the antlered-headband headdress. Real or iron antlers are attached to an iron ring that is also adorned with conical bells. This headband is usually worn on top of an embroidered skullcap. Both types of headdresses often have a long fringe in front that covers much of the shaman's face, which partly obstructs the shaman's vision but also aids in concentration during trance. However, this detail is actually not really significant because shamans often have their eyes closed while in ecstasy.⁷

Special shaman boots made of caribou hide are also part of some costumes. These may be adorned with fringe and conical bells. Significantly, the two boots are often made according to different patterns; this is a reflection of how the shaman is different from other people, especially at the time when the boots are being worn.

Shaman Drums

The drum is the most important tool for the shaman and takes many different forms throughout Mongolia and Siberia. All are one-sided hand-held drums, usually sixty centimeters or more in diameter, and are used to drive the singing and dancing that are part of most ceremonies. The hoop of the drum is usually between five and ten centimeters wide and is peeled from a living tree. Many Siberian drums are not exactly round, but slightly oval in shape. The grip of the drum usually has one of two forms. One is a simple cross of rawhide bands. The more common type is a wooden cross and wires strung between the grip and the rim and adorned with metal pendants that rattle when the drum is shaken or struck. These pendants are visualized by some shamans as spiritual arrows that can be sent against enemies. The head of the drum is usually made from either goat or deer hide, because the thin skin gives the drum a good sound. The inside and outside of the drum may be painted with symbols that are significant to the shaman. In Inner Mongolia some shamans use a slightly different drum, about thirty centimeters in diameter, with a handle attached to the

bottom of the hoop (like a mirror handle). In addition to its use as a musical instrument, the drum is sometimes used in healing. It will be rubbed against the shaman's chest in order to absorb windhorse and then placed on the patient so that the energy enters his body.⁸



Shaman drums with design of the four directions and the world center. Note horse-head beater and beater with jingle rings.



Drawings inside a shaman's drum. The hanging tassels are the drum's "ears."

Drumsticks are rather short, about twenty centimeters long, but rather thick and slightly spoon shaped. The striking surface is usually covered with some sort of fur. The backside of the stick has a wire strung with about twenty washerlike pendants that will rattle while the shaman is drumming. This kind of stick can also be used as a rattle. The drum may also be shaken to rattle the pendants inside the head.

Mirrors (Toli)

After the drum, the most important tool for Siberian shamans is the metal mirror (*toli*). The most desirable mirrors are antique mirrors that have been passed down and used by shamans for many generations. Some of these mirrors are literally thousands of years old and were made by Huns or by ancient Chinese. Mirrors of great age are *ezetzi*, having their own master spirits just like *ongons*. Mirrors do not have to be perfectly shiny to be useful for shamanizing; in fact, some of the best shaman mirrors are worn and hazy, which aids in visualization. Shaman mirrors vary from five to fifteen centimeters in diameter and are made of brass, bronze, iron, nephrite, or silver. Silver mirrors are usually small and are used mostly for healing. In the absence of metal mirrors, silvered glass mirrors can be used, but metal mirrors are preferable. A shaman will attach many *toli* to his costume if he can obtain them, but a *toli* over the chest is most important.



Bronze shaman mirror (toli) and large sprinkling spoon (sasali). It is traditional to decorate ceremonial objects with streamers of blue silk (khadag).



The author using the shaman mirror (toli) in healing work.

Mirrors are used in many different ways. The most common use is for diagnosis of disease. A shaman with some experience in mirror gazing can spot intrusions or hostile spirits in the reflection of a patient's body. The shaman may also be able to see how the disease started and if it was the result of a curse or a hostile shaman. Similarly, a mirror can be used for divination in a way similar to the use of crystal balls in Western countries.

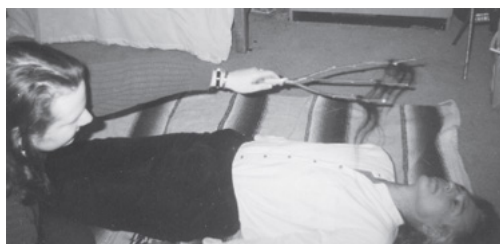
Furthermore, a mirror is an absorbent of energy in all frequencies, visible and invisible, and it absorbs energy from the universe at all times. A mirror also acts as armor and can protect the person wearing it from attack. For this reason mirrors are given to the sick and to small children. During healing rituals the mirror will be used to absorb intrusions from the patient's body or it can be pointed at hostile spirits to blind them with its energy and scare them away. A shaman may also rub the mirror clockwise over his own chest to absorb windhorse and then place the mirror on the person he is healing. A mirror may be placed in water so that its spirit will turn the water into *arshaan*, which is then drunk by the person being healed. The mirror is also capable of absorbing and holding spirits, most commonly disease spirits. When entering a mirror a spirit can be changed into another form; a shaman's spirit may enter the mirror in order to shape shift for the shamanic journey.

Staffs

Many shamans have one or two staffs (*murin*) that represent horses that are ridden during spirit journeys. These staffs are from one meter to one and one-half meters long and have one end that is carved to look like a horse's head, sometimes with miniature reins attached. They strongly resemble the horse-headed prayer sticks made by the plains tribes of North America. These staffs are also usually adorned with bunches of conical bells that will jingle when the shaman dances with them. Among some tribes in Siberia the beginning shaman will use the staffs before graduating to using the drum. The Khakass of southern Siberia also use a similar type of prayer stick called the *chalbek*, which is made from birch and adorned with squares of red and blue cloth. In the Buryat Geser myth, shaman staffs have magical powers for calming stormy waters, subduing evil spirits, and causing people to fall asleep.²

Fans and Whisks

The *dalbuur* is a ritual fan used by several Siberian groups, including the Yakut and Mongols, for healing rituals. It is usually made of either feathers or horsehair. A full description of a ritual using the *dalbuur* appears at the end of chapter 5. A whisk made of a bunch of small twigs is used for spraying ritual liquids (*arshaan*, milk, liquor, tea) on sacred objects or on people being healed. An intricately carved ritual wooden spoon, the *tsatsal*, is also used for this purpose.



The author using a dalbuur to clear intrusions from a patient.

Musical Instruments

Many Mongolian and Siberian shamans use other musical instruments besides the drum. The most common one is the *aman huur* (Jew's harp). Some shamans use the *aman huur* in lieu of the drum in some rituals and are capable of entering an ecstatic state from the music alone. Some shamans, especially among the Kirgiz and other Turkic peoples, use stringed instruments such as the horsehead fiddle.¹⁰

Other Tools and Power Objects

Among Mongolian shamans masks are generally not used except for the Avgaldai mask, the mask of the bear ancestor, which is used during the shamanic initiation. Swords or knives are used by some shamans to scare away evil spirits, because many spirits are afraid of iron. In Inner Mongolia a sword may be used in lieu of a staff or drum during journeying. Some shamans also have ritual whips that are used while riding the spiritual mount during the shamanic journey. Certain rocks, especially meteorites, quartz crystals, or other unusual stones, may be revered and kept as objects of power. Dropping these stones into water or liquor creates a special *arshaan* (empowered liquid) that contains the supernatural energy of the master spirits of the stones.

Drumming, Hallucinogens, and Other Paths to Ecstasy

Although shamans are known for going into trance to do their work, not all rituals require it, and the shaman performs many tasks in an ordinary state of consciousness. When an altered state of consciousness is required, however, there are many techniques that boost the shaman into the ecstatic state of mind that allows him to take on the qualities of a spirit and become clairvoyant and capable of spirit travel. Most rituals employ several of these techniques together in order to bring the shaman to an ecstatic state.

The setting of the ritual is crucial to its effectiveness. Shamanizing at night is conducive to achieving the trance state, and the fringe that covers the face also keeps out excessive light that can distract the shaman. In fact, many spirits are not as effective when called during the day except for the three months from the full moon of June to the full moon of September, when day and night are equally powerful for rituals. The people attending the ritual can help the shaman reach a trance state by echoing parts of his song, stomping, beating drums, or shouting along with the drumming. Circle dances can raise energy and propel the shaman into the upper world.¹¹

The beating of the shaman drum is the most powerful way to induce trance. Scientific studies have shown that repetitive rhythms at certain frequencies can induce a hypnotic state similar to the trance of shamans. Shamans' drumming, however, does not have a metronome-like steadiness, but rather will slow down or speed up and get louder or softer depending on the state of the shaman's mind at a given moment. Mongolian and Siberian drums are generally large in diameter and have a deep resonating sound that will vibrate through the shaman's body, and the drum is frequently held near the face or over the head so that the beat will resonate through the head and upper body with great force.

Intoxicants may be consumed before or during the ritual. Many shamans drink alcohol before shamanizing and pause at points during the ritual to smoke tobacco. Juniper, which is mildly hallucinogenic, is used in practically all rituals in Mongolia and in many parts of Siberia. The fumes of juniper will be waved in the face and inhaled, and the air of the *ger* will become thick with juniper smoke during the ritual. Sacred smoke is believed to raise windhorse and to be pleasing to the spirits. A more potent hallucinogen, the *mukhomor* mushroom, has been connected with Siberian and Mongolian shamanism from ancient times. While mushrooms are not always consumed during shamanist rituals, shamans may consume the dried mushrooms in order to achieve ecstasy during times between rituals. The hallucinogen in *mukhomor* is so powerful that the urine produced by the shaman after consuming it is still hallucinogenic and is drunk by some Siberian groups. Although in Mongolia and Buryatia today hallucinogenic mushrooms are seldom used, they are still eaten by the Koryak and Samoyed for shamanist rituals.¹²

Climbing the *turge* tree is another path to ecstasy. In Mongolian the word meaning "to go out" and "to go up" are the same, *garah*. Krysztyna Chabros has suggested that the connection between the two meanings of *garah* lies in shamanism. By symbolically ascending the representation of the World Tree, the shaman is literally going out of this world into the world of spirit. The *turge* tree has nine steps, and as the shaman climbs higher and higher, at the same time singing, the drumming and the encouragements of his audience will bring him to the ecstatic state. Mongolians believe that once the shaman has made contact with the spirits they will protect his physical body from accidents

(such as falling from the tree) during the course of his journey in the upper world. Some shamans will demonstrate contact with the spirit world by singing *hoomei* (overtone or throat singing), which consists of a bass note and a whistling overtone. The overtone represents the contact with the spirit world while the bass note represents remaining physically on earth. The resonance of the overtones in the head is also hypnotic and promotes trance.¹³

Riding the Cosmic Steed

Shamanic trance entails travel on the spirit plane of existence, and the shaman usually experiences this as either flying or riding an animal that carries him to the place in the three worlds where he is needed. These spirit journeys may take the shaman to places in this world or may require him to travel to the upper or lower worlds. Lower-world journeys are usually only required in cases of soul retrieval or bringing a dead person's soul to Erleg Khan. Most other rituals will require the shaman to travel on earth or ascend to the upper world. As noted previously, lower-world journeys are the most difficult and only the strongest shamans can go there safely. Many Altaic shamans speak of passing nine landmarks (*olohs*) during a journey regardless of which world they are traveling in.¹⁴

Spirit journeys usually start with a movement upward, and even when going to the lower world the trip will start with flight, frequently out through the smoke hole of the *ger*. The shaman may take the form of a bird or ride a flying supernatural mount. During the course of the journey the shaman may change form several times, at one point being a bird, at another taking on human form, and at still another the form of a bear, depending on which spirits are guiding him or entering his body. The shaman may utter animal sounds as he goes through these transformations. He may appear to be unconscious during the journey, or he may remain conscious but in a trancelike state and will be capable of moving around, dancing, or even telling his audience about what he sees. While in this state of mind the shaman is capable of acting completely out of character and can perform dangerous feats that he would be incapable of doing otherwise, such as stabbing himself, licking red-hot iron, or walking on fire.

The mount that a shaman rides during his travels is usually a flying horse or deer. These are physically represented by the one or two shaman staffs that he keeps handy during the ritual, or they may be represented by his drum. Before a ritual starts the drum is warmed by the fire; this is called *amiluulah*, "making the drum come alive." The drum not only drives the vision by its steady beat but is literally the steed upon which the shaman rides to his destination. Upon returning from his journey the shaman will cough or belch to expel the spirits that were riding with him inside his body. He then sings in praise of his spirit helpers before completing the ritual.

Following is a visualization/journey that is used by shamans from the region of the Altai Mountains. This is a typical shamanic journey of the Siberian tradition. It can be used for the experience itself, for the successful beginning of something new in one's life, or as a reference point for future shamanic journeys.

A Ritual Journey to Meet the Mountain Spirits

This ritual was especially important for shamans who were starting to practice in a new community, and during this journey the shaman would travel to and meet the patron spirit of the clan for which he was shamanizing. Unlike many other rituals in which the shaman travels to the upper or lower world, this is a middle-world journey. This ritual is also different from some other rituals because it is not necessary for the shaman's helper spirits to actually enter the shaman's body. If you feel your spirits come into you, however, you do not need to resist.

Shamanic rituals often take a somewhat different course from the basic procedure, but this is natural because the spirits ultimately know the best course to take in a certain situation. When performing a ritual the shaman follows the promptings of the spirits. For this reason, do not feel that this ritual has gone wrong if your journey does not perfectly match the visualization outlined here. Each shaman has his or her unique path, and that uniqueness must always be honored.

This ritual was traditionally performed inside the *ger* and involves offerings to the fire. If necessary, however, this journey may be done outside as a fire ceremony, or the fire offerings can be omitted. For the modern shamanic practitioner this journey can be used for two purposes, to journey and travel to find a new helper spirit for personal spiritual growth, or to invoke the help of the spirits and a new helper spirit when beginning a shaman practice in a new place. This would be an appropriate ritual for starting a new shamanic group or shamanism center.

In addition to the materials used for the ritual itself I recommend that you find a crystal, stone, or other significant object that can be used as an *ongon* or spirit seat for the helper spirit you will encounter on the journey. This object should then be kept in a place of honor, for it will bring you luck for as long as you pursue the matter for which you have traveled to find the helper spirit. This object should be on the altar during the ritual.

Things Needed for Ritual:

- Table for use as altar
- Thyme (ground thyme is best for smudging)
- Milk
- Spoon (a wooden one is traditionally used)
- Bowl, preferably one of a nonbreakable material
- Seven sticks, seven red ribbons, and seven white ribbons (only used if a fire ritual)

Note: See chapter 1 for other items needed for creating a sacred circle.

If this is a fire ritual you will tie one red and one white ribbon on each of the seven sticks. These sticks will be placed on the fire as an offering before you start your journey. To begin the ritual, you should create the sacred circle as described at the end of chapter 1. Smudging with thyme is traditionally done before the start of this journey and should be done if it is available. Once the circle has been created, put on any ritual garments you intend to use for your journey. You will then pour some milk in the bowl and walk once around the circle, throwing some upward to Father Heaven, some to the *tenger* of the four directions, and then some outward to the nature spirits.

The milk in the bowl should be depleted by the time you have walked one time sunwise around the circle. Before you start the ritual you should have decided on one important “yes” or “no” question. When you reach the south side of the circle, raise one hand upward to heaven and then lower it toward earth and ask the spirits to give you a true answer to the question. Take the bowl with this hand and throw it gently. If it lands with the open side up, the answer is yes; if it lands bottom up, the answer is no. If you have any food offerings to make to the fire, you should make them now. This is also the time to place the seven sticks in the fire.

Take your drum or rattle and go around the circle three times. When you are in the south, face southward and ask Usan Khan, the chief of the water spirits, for help on the journey. When you are in the north, turn to face the fire (or center of the circle) and ask Golomt Eej for help on the journey. When you have completed three trips around the circle, face south one last time and ask the spirit Altai Aab, the spirit of the Altai Mountains, to help you on your journey. Altai Aab is the spirit traditionally prayed to for this journey; you may call the master spirit of another place that is particularly sacred to you, but it should be a mountain spirit.

Sit or stand at the north part of the circle for the journey. You may either face the altar or face the fire, if you are using one.

Visualization of the Journey to the Mountain Spirits

Once you have begun drumming, imagine that you are inside a *ger*, a traditional Mongolian dwelling. You are sitting on a sheepskin facing a fire burning inside a square fire pit. On each side of the fire are two poles that support a circular smokehole. Above your head the poles supporting the roof of the *ger* slope upward and inward toward the smokehole. Imagine yourself becoming lighter and that you are able to drift upward effortlessly. You will suddenly find yourself able to drift lightly, like a puff of wind or smoke, up through the smokehole. What do you see when you emerge? Do you see the forest-covered mountain ranges of Mongolia? Or a rolling grassy plain? The beat of the drum is not only driving your vision, but you will suddenly realize that it is the hoofbeats of your steed. If it is a horse or a reindeer, what color is it? This is your magical shaman’s mount, capable of flying at tremendous speed through the sky. Feel the warmth of its body below you, and feel the wind rushing by your face as you climb higher and higher into the sky. You are not afraid, you are exhilarated, you have become like the eagle!

You will look down and see range after range of mountains passing below you; some are rocky, some covered with forest, and some with snow. Then suddenly you descend gently, and your mount is trotting on a mountain slope. You have come to an *oboo*. This is the first of nine *oboos* that you will pass on your journey. This one is grayish in color, with dry tree branches and chunks of quartz

crystal piled up into a conical heap higher than your head. Ride around it three times, and as you do so, describe how it looks and praise its master spirit. Then as soon as you have gone around the *oboo* three times (sunwise, of course), your mount will gently jump back up into the sky and you will proceed onward. You will pass a few mountains, then come down again for each of the next eight *oboos*. Circle each three times and describe it and praise the spirit as you did with the first.

When you have come to the last of the *oboos*, continue on through the forest rather than jumping into the sky. You will soon emerge into a grassy bowl-shaped valley. There are huge herds of cattle and horses all around you. None are afraid of you, and all that you meet will let you pass freely because they know you have come on an important mission. In the center of the bowl-shaped valley is an enormous *ger*, about 50 ft (15 m) in diameter. You will dismount, open the red-painted door, and go inside. It is dark and cool inside, and a small fire burns in the center below the smokehole. On the north side you will see the mountain spirits sitting on mats. What do they look like? The oldest and most distinguished looking of them is the mountain spirit from whom you have asked for help on your journey. Tell him sincerely about your plans for your shamanic work and what you plan to do with it for the benefit of yourself and those around you. You may not even need to speak the words; by seeing you there the spirits probably understand completely already. One of the spirits there will be the helper spirit that you have come to find. What does he or she look like? Thank the spirit for its help and tell it of the object that you have selected to be its dwelling place. In that way when it follows you back it will recognize where it will sit in your holy place.

Once you have spoken with the spirits there to the degree you feel necessary, you are free to go on. It is very likely that the spirits will give you some sort of special message or messages either for you or possibly for someone else if there are several people doing this ritual with you. You may then exit from the spirits' *ger*, remount, and fly back to where you started from. If you have other shamanic business to attend to you may do it during this part of the journey. When you return to the place where you started, you will gently drop through the smokehole and you will find yourself back in the circle.

If you are doing a fire ritual throw a little milk into the fire as an expression of thanks to the spirits for a successful journey. Pick up the object that will be the residence of the helper spirit and hold it upward toward the center of the circle. Think of the helper spirit as it appeared to you during the journey. You will feel the spirit come into the *ongon*. From that time onward you must treat it with the same respect that you would treat the spirit if it appeared in human form. Dab the object with a little bit of milk. Afterwards it is customary to feed the spirit of the *ongon* by periodically dabbing a little butter on it.

Chapter 5

Healing and Protection

I hear the roots act as shaman
and I hear the rustle of the leaves
and the consciousness of a higher kinship
Drowns out the voice of my blood

—Bayar S. Dugarov, *Sagaan-Dali*,
translation by Laurie Daniels



There are a few interesting legends about how disease first came to the Earth. In most cases it is blamed on the eastern *tenger*, who represent the hidden, feminine, and destructive aspects of nature. One legend blames Erleg Khan, ruler of the lower world and leader of the eastern *tenger*, for spreading disease in the early days of the earth. It was his intention that human beings should not be perfect and immortal, for perfection in the world must be balanced by imperfection and weakness. In order to keep the world in balance for all time the western *tenger* sent the Eagle as the first shaman and his children were the first human shamans. In another story one of the eastern *tenger*, Atai Ulaan, is shattered into pieces while fighting with one of the western *tenger*, Han Hormasta. When the pieces floated down to earth they caused several epidemics and hordes of new *chotgor* appeared on the earth. It was at this time that Bukhe Beligte Tenger was sent down to earth to become the prototype warrior/shaman Geser Bogdo.

Causes of Illness—Spirit Intrusions and Soul Loss

The root cause of all illness can be imbalance of a person's souls caused by disruption in the pattern of the souls' movement in the body, intrusions by foreign spirits, or outright soul loss brought about by spiritual or physical trauma. Shamans are aware of the fact that the physical symptoms of illness must also be treated, and medicines are used in addition to spiritual healing. The spiritual aspect of the illness, however, is important because the physical symptoms alone are not the true problem. Spirit intrusion and soul loss suppress the body's natural capability to heal itself, so unless the spiritual ailment is cured, the physical disease will never truly be healed.

Interestingly enough, however, it is known among Siberian shamans that infinitely small worms called *kulikan* can cause some diseases. The description of these creatures closely resembles what scientists know about bacteria. Perhaps in the eyes of spirit, shamans in the past have actually glimpsed this microscopic, hidden aspect of the world while journeying.¹

Spirits that cause illness may be *chotgor* (hostile ancestor spirits), *burhan* (nature spirits), or evil shamans. *Chotgor*, ancestor spirits, and other less powerful nature spirits can often be expelled by singing or the waving of the *dalbuur* over the patient. The disease spirit may also be removed by sucking or pulling gestures that draw it out of the body. Combatting more powerful spirits or hostile shamans will require going into trance. *Burhan* are the most powerful and may need sacrifices to make them go away. The shaman may use knives, a red-hot iron, or a bow and arrow to scare the disease spirit or blind it with reflected light from his mirror. An *ongon* or the *toli* may be used to catch a spirit in order to keep it from jumping into another person when it is expelled, or the shaman may temporarily absorb it into his body. In such cases the shaman travels part of the way to the lower world and then bids the spirit to return to the lower world and leave the patient alone. If a temporary *ongon* is used it is then thrown away in a natural place or destroyed so that the spirit will not return to it. These temporary *ongons* are frequently made of grass in the form of a man or dog and are called *tsats* or *beemee* (“rotten thing”).²

In cases where a mirror or *ongon* is used during a healing it may be left with the patient for a period of time afterward so that the spirit of the *ongon* or mirror will continue to give its protection to the patient. This is most often done with children because of the instability of their souls. A shaman may make a special *ongon* that has bells on it for the healing of a small child so that the child will play with it and stay focused on it during the healing ritual. If the child has been severely ill, he or she may be given the name of the protecting *ongon* in order to keep all who are around the child focused on the *ongon* spirit and its purpose for remaining in the household. The mention of the *ongon* spirit’s name strengthens and renews its protection.³

Soul Retrieval

Soul retrieval is usually necessary in cases of severe and chronic illness. The absence of the *ami* or *suns* souls makes it practically impossible for a body to function normally.

Children are especially susceptible to soul loss until about the age of seven, when the souls become effectively stabilized within the body. For this reason parents often obtain an energized *toli* (mirror) from a shaman to protect small children. Also, there are several customs to confuse the spirits so that the child is not attacked. One custom involves changing a child's name or giving it such names as Enebish, Terbish, Nergui, Nohoibish, Muu Nohoi, or Baahan (respectively, "not this," "not that," "no name," "not the dog," "bad dog," or "shit"). Parents also customarily refrain from praising small children excessively, and until a child talks, it is referred to as being *muuhai* (disgusting). Among the Buryats there was also a custom of making a shaman the *naija* (friend) of a small child so that his spirits would extend their protection to the baby.

Evil or jealous spirits will steal souls out of pure spite or mischief. The most dangerous of free-ranging spirits are the *suld* or *suns* souls of young people who did not come of age and who resent the good fortune of people who have become parents.

In other cases, soul loss due to spirit interference may be the result of excessive attachment between a living person and someone who has died. Mongols and Siberians believe that it is literally dangerous to think or talk too much about recently dead relatives, for the *suns* souls of these people linger near their relatives and friends for a certain period of time before going to the lower world. Thinking too much about past attachment to dead people may cause the *suns* soul of the living person to follow the dead friend or relative to the lower world, or perhaps become lost on the way. The greatest danger is to children whose mothers have died.

Of the three souls that reside in the body, the *ami* gets lost the most easily; often just being scared, sneezing, or otherwise letting the breath out suddenly may expel it. However, the *ami* soul remains in this world and can generally be easily found and returned to the body by a shaman. *Ami* souls of small children can often be called back by their parents. A lost *suns* soul may linger near the body, but if it goes on to the lower world a difficult and dangerous journey by the shaman is

required to bring it back. When a lost soul is found, it is placed in the shaman's ear or inside the drum for the return trip, then shaken back out into the body. When a spirit has stolen a soul, the shaman may need to fight the spirit to let it go. Soul retrievals are the most dangerous work for shamans because they have to travel outside their bodies for long distances and they are vulnerable to attack and soul loss themselves during the journey.

The most powerful soul-retrieval ritual in Mongolian shamanism is the *dolbor*, or night-road ritual. It is called the night-road ritual because it is always performed at night, usually starting at sunset. In this journey the shaman follows the World River, called Dolbor or Engedekit, to the entrance of the lower world in the Arctic Ocean. The World River is full of rapids and other trials for the shaman and each shaman lineage has its own tributary that flows into it. The shaman travels surrounded by his helper spirits, who assist him and protect him from attack during the journey. After arriving in the lower world the shaman may meet Erleg Khan himself, the judge of all souls, and ask for the return of the lost *suns* of the person being treated. The effects of the *dolbor* ritual can be very dramatic even when performed from a remote location.

Ariulga: Purification Rituals

There is another type of ritual that is performed for people who either have been affected by mental illness, drugs, or alcohol, or have had their bodies violated or polluted in some other way. Sources of pollution may be poison, rape, sexual molestation, promiscuity, violent crime, or some unusual contact with death. In such cases the spirit itself has been traumatized and deprived of power, and the effects of the violation of the body and spirit need to be neutralized. In certain cases a house or place may also need to be purified because it was the site of death, violence, haunting, or some other polluting act.

The actual process of purification is quite straightforward. Certain substances, mostly smoke and liquids, are recognized as having the ability to clean both physically and spiritually.

Since spirit is considered to be like air, and spiritual energy is visualized as windhorse, smoke is essential to purification. There are several types of smoke used, including incense, sage, juniper, fir, and thyme. Incense is the least powerful but can be used in the absence of the others. The two smokes considered the most effective are juniper and fir, especially in the form of dried whole sprigs. The most basic form of *ariulga*, or purification, which is practiced by many shamans upon rising in the morning, is to light a sprig of juniper and pass it three times around the body in a sunwise direction and to allow the smoke to bathe the face, especially the third eye and crown chakra. A daily habit of *ariulga* upon getting up in the morning is a good way to cultivate spiritual power.

The other ingredient used in *ariulga* is *arshaan*, empowered liquid. *Arshaan* is usually made from springwater or from vodka. Vodka is used because it is considered to be very pure. Many shamans will keep a bottle of *arshaan* on hand for use in personal spiritual purification as well as for rituals. Shamans will often steep herbs such as juniper or fir in the water, giving it a slight green color. It is, however, also common for patients to provide a container of their own springwater or vodka. In such cases the shaman will convert it into *arshaan* by calling his spirits and then breathing into the liquid three times in order to imbue it with their power (notice the symbolism of psychic power as windhorse).

Most *ariulga* rituals will alternately smudge the person being treated with sacred smoke and then spray the person's body with *arshaan*. In most cases the *arshaan* is sprayed using a small whisk made of a bundle of thin, short twigs, but some shamans will take the *arshaan* into their mouth and then spray it from their mouth onto the patient's head. Also, the *arshaan* may be sprinkled by dipping the ring finger of the left hand into the liquid and flicking it (similar to *tsatsah*, except that for *tsatsah* one uses the ring finger of the right hand). The *arshaan* may also be drunk as a medicine afterward. In most cases the patient is alternately smudged and sprayed three times. The *ariulga* may be repeated several times if the spiritual pollution is strong.

One Buryat legend very accurately describes this treatment. The hero was given *ariulga* for three days after being freed from the magic of an evil shaman. The *ariulga* he received was of the most radical type, for it started with purgation, that is, forcing him to vomit. Afterward he was smudged with juniper and sprayed with *arshaan* from nine different springs. In most cases, however, purgation is not required, but an experienced shaman will be able to determine which kind of sacred smoke and *arshaan* is needed, the length of the treatment, and whether the patient needs to vomit. In addition to sacred smoke and *arshaan*, the shaman may also throw other things on the patient three times, depending on what his helper spirits advise. These substances are usually sand, salt, and grain (most commonly rice).

In cleansing a place that has been polluted the shaman will smudge the area with sacred smoke, usually juniper. Afterward the place will be sprinkled with *arshaan*. To finish the cleansing and to protect against further pollution the shaman will walk three times around the perimeter of the area being cleansed, throwing sand, salt, and grain. The peace-tree ritual at the end of chapter 8 is a variation of the *ariulga* used to cleanse a place.

Spiritual Warfare

Some shamanic work entails spiritual warfare. A shaman may struggle physically and violently with a stubborn spirit, even using weapons, and his spirits fight alongside him to subdue or drive away the intruder. When a hostile shaman is causing illness an ongoing war between the local clan shaman and that of an enemy clan may ensue. These spiritual battles may last for long periods of time and may result in the death of the weaker shaman. Shamans who routinely attack other people aggressively may lose their ability to heal, however, and such shamans lose their status within the community and in the past were even killed. In general, spiritual warfare is a dangerous business because it can set off a long cycle of attack and retribution.

In sending a hostile spirit to the lower world a shaman may place sharp objects along the route he will use to expel the spirit. In one Evenk shaman's tent, for example, a well-defined route going from its entrance to a series of posts, and representing the World River, was full of fierce animals and *ongons* armed with weapons standing ready to repel any spirit that might try to return to the shaman. A shaman may also symbolically shoot or stab a spirit in order to weaken it. With the help of his spirits, the shaman may compel the hostile spirit into an *ongon*. In this case the *ongon* will be destroyed (burned or torn apart) at a location some distance from the site of the ritual, or thrown into water, since water will carry the spirit to the entrance to the lower world in the Arctic Ocean. When such an *ongon* is destroyed it is usually in a place where there is some physical barrier between the person being treated and the *ongon*, such as a street, fence, or river, in order to thwart the return of the spirit that has been removed.

In some cases the spirit that attacks a shaman may not be a human *suns* soul, but rather one of the nature spirits, such as a *burhan*, *ozoor*, *chotgor*, *ojan*, or a *suld* soul that has settled in nature. In some cases these may have been sent by a rival shaman or invoked in a curse by an enemy. *Chotgor* and *ojan* are fairly weak and can be easily subdued by most shamans. The other types of spirits, and even former *suld* souls, can be quite powerful, especially if the soul has settled in a spiritually powerful place or if it was powerful while alive, such as with the *suld* of a dead shaman. Spirits most commonly attack a shaman while he is journeying, since the shaman is vulnerable to soul loss while being out of the body, but sometimes they will attack him even while in his body. For this reason the shaman costume is to a certain degree also visualized as being a type of spiritual armor.

Fighting these spirits usually requires the assistance of the shaman's own helper spirits, *ongons*, and power animals. In some cases a helper spirit will enter the shaman's body and the shaman will "eat" the intruder spirit. The enemy spirit will then be weakened, but if it recovers it might retaliate.

The safest action for a shaman dealing with a hostile spirit is to master it, adding it to his group of spiritual allies if his other

helper spirits agree. True mastering of the spirit is required, however, because if a mastered spirit that has been evil is not fully under a shaman's control it may turn on the shaman and make him insane or evil. Spirits that cannot be mastered have to be placated, sometimes with animal sacrifices.

Some Mongolian and Siberian legends speak of evil spirits in the past that were greedy and required large and expensive sacrifices in order to placate them. In recent history, however, there is little mention of spirits making such extravagant demands. Shamans have also found that they can "dicker down" the demands of spirits for placation to a shot of vodka, a few cups of beer, or perhaps a goat or a sheep.

The most troublesome enemy a shaman can have is a rival shaman. The spirits generally do not approve of using shamanic powers for destructive and selfish purposes. I have had a few shamans pointed out to me who had abused their powers in the past for revenge or other evil purposes and who have now found that the spirits no longer hear them.

Since as a shaman I depend on my spirits' powers in order to do my work, being abandoned by the spirits is the most horrifying thought imaginable. For that reason I weigh the ethics of all of my work very carefully to ensure that it will not cause evil or imbalance. Furthermore, it is considered good practice among all Mongolian and Siberian shamans not to boast about their own powers and accomplishments to excess.

It is believed that shamanic helper spirits are offended if shamans receive praise for their work without acknowledging that they do shamanic work through the power of the spirits and not because they are themselves superior to other human beings. For this same reason it is generally considered crass for shamans to state a price for their services; rather, the people they serve should reward them according to how the shamanic work is valued and their own material wealth.

Having defined the limits of ethical behavior for shamans, it may still be the experience of some shamans to be faced with attack by people who do not worry about ethical behavior. In Mongolia and Siberia, curses made on a shaman may bring attack from spirits invoked by the curse; in some cases

unethical shamans, lamas, or priests are enlisted to make these curses. An experienced shaman will be able to determine the source of the trouble, and in the case of most curses they can be sent back to the person who made them without harm to the shaman.

Returning a curse to the originator is considered to be well within shamanic ethics. It is important, however, not to augment the curse by returning it with malicious intent, which does step over the line of good shamanic behavior. Such a cycle of attack and retaliation may continue for some time, sometimes causing one of the shamans to become incapacitated. The spirits do keep some control over this, however, since they generally disapprove of the abuse of shamanic powers. Attacks by shamans on other shamans were more common in the tribal past when clans and tribes were often fighting among themselves, and shamans would spiritually attack the enemy or the enemy's shaman, causing illness or soul loss. One shaman might "eat" another shaman's soul using the assistance of his helper spirits, causing the enemy shaman to be weakened spiritually and physically. In general it is good practice for a shaman to keep aware of the helper spirits around him at all times and wear a mirror in order to be safe from spiritual attack. In most cases the helper spirits and the mirror will repel the attacks of all but the most powerful shamans.

Protecting Oneself and Others

There are a few basic ways to keep the spiritual protection around oneself strong, and these same techniques can be applied to other people or even objects that need protection. The basic idea is specifically to ask the shamanic helper spirits to grant protection. While shamanizing, a shaman is generally about as safe as possible, since the shaman should call the helper spirits before starting his or her work.

For personal protection it is good to smudge oneself each morning and pass the smudge of juniper, sage, or thyme around the body three times. If you have *arshaan*, pour a little in your right palm, sip a little, and then rub the rest over the

crown of the head and third eye (middle of the forehead). This technique should also be used by people for whom you have done a healing or soul retrieval. For this reason it is customary in Mongolia and Siberia for patients to bring liquids for conversion into *arshaan* (described in the exercise at the end of this chapter).

When you do this for yourself, silently (or aloud, if you feel like it) ask the spirits to be around you on all sides and to empower you to do your work throughout the day. If you should be fortunate enough to obtain a metal or nephrite mirror, it is good to wear it over the heart when protection is needed, such as when traveling or going to a dangerous place. It is also customary for patients to provide a mirror to be energized by the shaman for protection during recovery from illness or soul loss.

Protective energy may also be placed on persons or objects. Call the spirits and allow protective energy to flow from your hands into the person or object. This can even be done to protect cars or houses. Another protection technique is to ask the spirits to keep dangerous people away, to make such people either unaware or afraid of you. This is a good technique to use when going to a dangerous place at night.

The main thing to remember is that the spirits are always available for protection; in fact, they protect the shaman even when they are not called, but acknowledging their presence makes the protection stronger. As the Yakut shaman says, the spirits are above and below, in front, and behind, to the left and to the right, and like a flock of birds accompany the shaman wherever he or she goes.

Two Healing Techniques

The following are two rituals for healing illness caused by spirit intrusions. While the first technique is quite simple, the second is more involved and recommended for especially strong spirits.

Cleansing by Fire

The first healing technique is very simple and was shown to me by a shaman from Hovd in western Mongolia. This technique is a good example of how Mongolian shamans can work with some of the simplest things and get very effective results. This one was used to cure the partial paralysis of a person's face, but can be applied to any kind of illness caused by intrusions. It is also an interesting technique because it is one of several rituals I saw that required neither drumming nor costume; however, the person performing it must be capable of meditation or otherwise inducing a near-trancelike state without use of a drum.

Things Needed for Ritual:

- Juniper, sage, or incense (sacred smoke) with burner
- Mirror (metal mirror preferable)
- Wooden matches
- Vodka, milk, or tea in a container
- Cup
- Small plate

The patient should be either lying down or sitting in a chair. It is best if his or her legs and arms are not crossed, as this disrupts the energy flow in the body field. Have the burner for your smoke, the matches, a container of the beverage you are using, and the cup and plate placed on a table within easy reach of where you will sit.

The first thing to do is to light the juniper or other source of sacred smoke. When lighting it, use three matches together and first raise them up to Father Heaven and then point them downward toward Mother Earth. Feel the flow of energy between them, and wave the energy into your own soul sphere. This flow will also infuse the matches with energy that will allow the sacred smoke to have special power for cleansing. Pass the sacred smoke around yourself three times (sunwise) and then either fan the smoke into the patient's face or have the patient do it to him- or herself. Most importantly, the smoke should flow over the third eye and crown chakra.

Take out the mirror, wipe the surface clean, and hold it over the source of sacred smoke to allow its cleansing energy to penetrate the mirror. Sit next to the patient and go into a meditative state. If you feel so inclined, pray or chant to bring the help of your spirits. When you have come into a state of trance or contact with your spirit helpers, look at the image of the patient as reflected in the mirror. You will see the intrusion in the patient's body and the spirits may give you additional information about the nature of the intrusion. By running your hand along the length of the patient's body (about an inch above the surface of the skin) you can feel the location of the intrusion in the patient's body. Intrusions will be sensed as heat or prickling on your palm. Once you have fully diagnosed the location and size of the intrusion, you are ready for the next step of the procedure.

Before you proceed, be sure that any flammable objects such as hair or clothing are removed or pulled back from the location of the intrusion. Take three matches again, infusing them with the energy of heaven and earth, and strike them, all three at once. Hold the flame as close as possible to the intrusion without burning the skin. In Mongolian shamanism, fire is considered to have a cleansing effect and will drive away the intruding spirit. It is best if you bring the flame to the skin in a sudden, rapid movement, frightening the intruding spirit. Hold the flame to the intrusion until the matches go out, then throw them on the plate. Do this two more times until there are nine spent matches. It has been my experience that with each time I hold the matches to the location of the intrusion the matches burn more vigorously as the intrusion is driven away. In most cases the spirit of the intrusion will be driven far away and will not return. If the spirit is more powerful, you may want to do a journey to ensure it returns to the lower world (see last section of the *dalbuur* ritual that follows).

Take the container of vodka, milk, or tea and pour a small amount into the cup, just enough to cover the bottom, then throw it into the air as an offering to the spirits that are helping you. Return to where you were sitting and meditate once more on your helper spirits. Ask them to energize your breath, and

when you feel ready, blow three times into the container containing the liquid. This liquid is now *arshaan*, energized with the power of your helper spirits. The patient should drink a cupful of the *arshaan* every night until it is gone. The patient should now pick up the nine burned matches, break them in half, and then go outside and throw them away. The breaking of the matches cuts off any connection between the patient and the intruding spirit. It is even more effective if the broken matches are thrown on the other side of a street, alley, or sidewalk.

The Dalbuur Ritual

This is a rather complex but very effective ritual for any kind of illness caused by spirit intrusion. It is best employed when you are dealing with a spirit that is quite strong and resists being removed from the patient. The ritual takes its name from the instrument that is used for it, the *dalbuur*. The *dalbuur* is a spirit fan and has two forms. The Yakut form uses a stick about a foot long that has three branches on it. To each of these three branches the shaman will tie a few strands of horsehair (mane or tail hair). This can be a permanent *dalbuur* for repeated use or temporarily made for the ritual. The Mongolian form is a feather fan, very similar to those used by Native Americans for smudging and dancing (I used a Lakota feather fan as a *dalbuur* for my own work for many years). *Dalbuur* literally means “wing,” since the feather fan resembles a wing.

In preparation for this ritual, please refer to the setup for the ritual of the sacred circle at the end of chapter 1. The first section of the *dalbuur* ritual is identical to it. If done outside, a small fire is preferable to the incense burner. If done inside, be sure to sweep the area of the ritual circle; it is said that bad spirits like to hide in dust. Be sure that the entire ritual area is smudged before starting. A rug, or (preferably) an animal skin, should be placed on the ground or floor before the altar. This will be where the shaman sits for the journey. You will of course need a *dalbuur* and a mirror. If you do not have a feather fan, you can make a Yakut-type *dalbuur* with a branched stick with either strands of horsehair (preferable) or

ribbons, if horsehair is not available. Place your *dalbuur* and mirror on the altar before the ritual begins; you will pick them up at the appropriate point in the ritual. Be sure to have at least one cup of vodka, tea, or milk on the altar for use in the last part of the ritual.

This ritual is traditionally held at night, but I find it is just as effective if done during the day. After creating the sacred circle you will exit the circle. It is customary not to do the first section of the ritual in costume. You will put on any ritual clothing that you may use while shamanizing when you go outside the circle at the end of the first section. The person being treated may lie down inside the circle on the eastern side, or lie down nearby the circle. In any case, he or she should lie down facing up with legs and arms uncrossed. You should also warn the patient ahead of time that you will jump on him or her during the healing procedure, otherwise the person may be frightened by your action. If for some reason the person who is sick cannot be present, place rocks on the floor or ground on the eastern side of the circle, one for each of the seven chakras and four for the hands and feet (I keep a basket of rocks and crystals for use in various rituals).

In my experience doing this ritual from a remote location is just as effective as when the patient is present. According to the beliefs of Siberian shamanism, when the circle is created it represents all places and all times. For this reason I have been able to work on people in Mongolia while I have been in the United States with the same success as if I were actually in Mongolia at the time. The most important thing is to be able to visualize the body of the afflicted individual as if he or she were actually present. If you can add to the placement of stones a personal possession or something that has been in contact with the person being treated, it may be helpful in the remote healing. In effect, the person is present wherever the circle is created.

Calling the Spirits

Reenter the circle, sit down on the rug or skin by the altar, and, facing the fire (or center of the circle), strike your drum three

times. In your own words, you will then make an invocation to the spirits, asking the following things:

- That the foreign spirit or spirits leave the patient and that the tribes of the lower-world spirits take their members back and not be angry.
- That the nature spirits of the place where the ritual is being performed assist you in your work.
- That your helper spirits and power animals that you call support you and give you the skills and knowledge needed to perform the healing in the most easy and effective way.

If you have someone working with you, have him or her strike matches three times above your head. This cleanses your body field and drives away any hostile spirits that may be around you. If you are alone, strike fire above your head three times (you may also use a lighter for this). Approach the fire (or center of the circle), and strike the ground with your drumstick as if to make an opening in the ground. Command any unwanted spirits within the circle to enter into this opening and then command the opening to close. You will then shake your drum vigorously and turn counterclockwise three times over where you made the opening. This is the only case I know of in Siberian shamanism where counterclockwise movement is used. Sit back down and continue drumming until you enter a trancelike or deeply meditative state.

Using the Dalbuur

You are now ready to use the *dalbuur*. There needs to be a certain element of surprise in your next action because your sudden rapid movement will probably scare the intruding spirit out straightaway. After picking up the *dalbuur* from the altar, rapidly and suddenly run toward the patient and jump on top of his or her body (do try to be gentle). You should be lying lengthwise along the patient's body, face to face, chest to chest.

Feel the vibration of the souls coursing up and down the patient's body axis. Visualize that the *suld* soul is shining

strongly on the crown of the patient's head and that the *suns* and *ami* souls are moving up and down the soul axis in a regular, healthy pattern. Get up and wave the *dalbuur* back and forth along the axis of the patient's body. Hold the mirror in your other hand so that it will absorb the intruder spirit that will leave the body. In many cases this alone will be enough to drive the spirit out. Set the mirror down beside the patient and run your hand along the length of the patient's body to be sure that there are no other intrusions. Since you are in a shamanic state of mind, any further intrusions may be directly visible to you as well.

If intrusions are found, hold the mirror next to the intrusion and vigorously fan the intruding spirit out into the mirror. If it is particularly stubborn you may need to suck or pull it out, then expel the spirit from your mouth or hand into the mirror. Once you are done, turn the mirror face down on the ground and imagine the spirits going to the first *oboo* on the path to the lower world (see next section for explanation). The spirits will await you there until you reach that place in your journey. If you are using a placement of stones in the absence of the actual patient, perform these same actions while visualizing the body.

After this part of the ritual the shaman traditionally takes a break to smoke his pipe; if you use a ritual pipe you may use it here. Otherwise you may continue to the next part.

The Journey

During this part of the ritual, if you have another person working with you, have him or her do the drumming while you lie face down on the carpet or skin during the journey. Otherwise you should sit on the carpet or skin and drum. Use your usual technique for lower-world journeying. Usually this is visualized as going down a tunnel through the ground or flying northward toward the entrance to the lower world in the form of a bird or by riding the drum (it will take the form of a horse or deer). On the route to the lower world there are nine landmarks. The first is an *oboo*, and this is where you left the spirits you extracted in the last part of the ritual.

Walk around the pile of rocks three times and praise the master spirit of the *oboo* for keeping the spirits until you came. Ask him to send the spirits back to the lower world. Tell the spirits not to come and trouble human beings again, and promise that you will give them a drink after the ritual is finished. You will then see them fly away in the direction of the lower world. Continue your journey however you feel guided until you return to where you started.

To conclude, if you are using a fire, place onto it a little of any drink or food offerings you have on the altar. Thank the spirits for their assistance in your work, then send them away by blowing vigorously three times. Take the remaining liquid that is in the bowl on the altar, go outside, and pour it on the ground as a gift to the spirits you have sent away.

Chapter 6

Fortune-telling and Dreams

Tengger existing from ancient times
Created countless things,
But when we sit and think about it
That multitude is not all the same.
The roads of men's destinies
Are not equally good

—Anonymous Dagur Mongol, from Humphrey
and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*



Seeing the future is an important part of shamans' work, whether in Mongolia, Siberia, or elsewhere. Naturally, there are several different techniques for seeing the future. It is usually glimpsed with the assistance of one or more divination techniques, or through dreaming.

Fortune-telling Techniques

There are several fortune-telling techniques used in Mongolia and Siberia. What is common to all of them is that the spirits should be invoked in some fashion, either aloud or silently, before asking a question.

Throwing Objects

Various objects can be thrown and read for answers. The simplest ones are the cup used in shamanic rituals or the shaman's drumstick, which can be used for simple "yes" or "no" questions. Some shamans will also roll the mirror on edge and see which side is up when it falls down. A more complex reading technique involves the throwing of *shagai*, animal anklebones roughly cubical in shape. Coins are used in still other reading techniques, one using five coins, in which all five are read, and a different technique using nine coins that is described in detail at the end of this chapter.

Gazing

Several different gazing techniques are used in shamanism. The most common is mirror gazing. The shaman mirror, being rather hazy, is good for visualization, and a shaman can get very detailed answers from the mirror alone if he has a talent for mirror gazing. Some shamans gaze into unopened bottles of liquor, placing the palm of one hand behind the liquid. Another method is gazing into a bowl of water or other clear liquid. Quartz crystals may also be used for gazing. Still another, more unusual, technique is wood gazing, which is looking for omens in the patterns formed by the grain in a piece of wood. An experienced reader can spot many significant images and symbols within the pattern of the grain.

Fire

Several shamanic techniques involve the use of fire. One of the most famous techniques uses the shoulder blade of a sheep or deer. After the meat has been stripped from the bone, it is placed into the fire for a short time and then removed before it ignites. The shaman will then inspect the bone to see where it has been burned and where it has

cracked. There are several books used by shamans to interpret the patterns of burns and cracks.

Another method is simply gazing into the fire itself. Images may appear in the flames or within the embers. The sounds of the fire also have meaning, especially sudden hisses, pops, or crackles. Crackling noises are considered to be a sign of an unseen spirit in the vicinity. The timing of fire sounds with what is being talked about is also significant.

Yet another technique uses incense sticks. Three incense sticks are selected and each one is assigned a meaning or outcome with regard to a question. The three sticks are then lit and the pattern of their burning is watched. Sticks that burn more quickly or go out can give very specific information about a question.¹

Still another technique involves fire. A question or wish is written on a piece of paper and then placed in the fire. The way it burns tells a lot about how the wish will be fulfilled. It is best if it burns quickly down to pure white ash; if it burns only to black or burns slowly it means the problem will be solved slowly. If it refuses to burn a favorable outcome is probably impossible.

Natural Phenomena

The world of nature will often provide answers to questions or omens regarding their outcome. Most commonly, the flight of birds gives a lot of information. Those most important for divination are hawks, eagles, and other meat-eating birds, as well as ravens, vultures, and other carrion eaters. Predatory birds are generally considered good omens, while carrion-eating birds are generally considered bad. Flying to the right is good while flying to the left is generally bad. If a bird flies very close, toward you, or directly overhead the sign is especially important. If the bird plunges down to kill an animal and succeeds, it is good; if the bird fails, it means disaster is soon to follow. Spotting large flocks of birds is generally good if they are migratory birds or songbirds, but flocks of ravens are a bad omen. As with divination by fire, the meanings of the birds will become evident with experience.

Here are a few examples. About five years ago a vulture flew directly in front of my car headed to the left. Only a short time afterward a rock kicked up by a truck shattered my windshield. In another example my friend and I were out in the countryside in Mongolia when suddenly an eagle plunged down from above toward the left. When it came down, however, the rabbit it tried to catch got away and the eagle stumbled awkwardly on the ground. When I saw

the eagle beginning his plunge I had said to my friend it was a sign for him. He was astonished by what happened and asked what it meant. Because the eagle had failed while flying to the left and then had stumbled on the ground, it was an omen that a calamity was to befall him very soon. That very same day he was arrested. One good sign was when I was preparing to leave for Mongolia in 1994 and I saw an eagle snatch up a rabbit within about twenty feet of me. That trip turned out to be an extremely good one with extraordinary good luck.

Weather can sometimes provide important omens as well. If lightning strikes a tree, livestock, or house it is a sign of Father Heaven's anger toward the person who owns it. Good weather signs are the sudden opening of the clouds and the sun or moon appearing, especially if it occurs during a shaman ceremony or divination. If the clouds open and a shaft of light falls upon something, the object that is illuminated has significance. Unusual clouds appearing during a shamanic ritual are a sign that *Tenger* favors what is being done; frequently straight, raylike white clouds will appear during shamanic events. During a shamanist gathering a few years ago a line of white light appeared on the surface of Lake Baikal; its cause is still a mystery. One dramatic natural sign occurred in connection with a recent Mongolian ritual held at the erection of a shrine to Bukhe Beligte *Tenger* in the Sayan Mountains. Shamans had predicted it would reawaken the spirit of this *tenger* and an earthquake that followed the ritual at the new shrine fulfilled their prophecy.

Other Divination Methods

Two other divination methods used in Inner Mongolia require knowledge of the exact location of the four directions. The interpretations are rather flexible and require a lot of intuition on the part of the shaman. The first is to stand a chopstick on end and see which direction it points to when it falls down. The second is to place an egg on a mirror (preferably a shaman's mirror) and see in which direction it rolls. If the question is related to travel, business, or lost objects, the direction indicated shows either the most lucky direction for the questioner's desired activity or it will show the location of the thing that has been lost. The other interpretation is related to the meaning of the four directions. Left in general means negative or female, right is positive or male. North is past, while south is the future.²

A lot of Mongols do divination with beads, mostly as a type of diagnosis in cases of illness or bad luck. The person doing the

reading will play with a string of beads in his or her hand without looking at it. At a certain point, when it feels right, the person will stop, holding one bead between the thumb and forefinger of the left or right hand. The reader will then count the number of beads from where he stopped in groups of sixes until there are no more groups of six beads to be counted off before reaching the tassel at the end of the string. The remaining beads will either be none or up to five beads. Each number has specific meaning from a shamanic standpoint, some good, some bad. A good reader can get much information from the beads and prescribe the appropriate ritual for the question being asked.

Another diagnostic technique involves the dropping of pebbles. A diagram is drawn on the ground or on a piece of paper. The design is either six rays going out from a center point, or eight sections going out from a small center circle; this latter pattern is called “eight petals of heaven’s door.” After the shaman asks the spirits for help in giving a true reply he takes a pea-sized pebble he has selected, blows on it, and then drops it gently from a point about a foot above the center of the design. The pebble will bounce and roll, coming to rest somewhere within the pattern the shaman has drawn. Each part of the pattern has specific shamanic meanings, showing what kind of spirits are affecting the individual, what will be the effect of their presence, and what ritual is required to deal with them. An even more complicated pebble reading method using up to fifty pea-sized precious stones is used in western Mongolia and among the Turkic peoples of Siberia.

There is a Mongolian astrology that is closely related to Chinese astrology. Mongolian astrology, however, has been adapted to include shamanist as well as Buddhist interpretations. As in Chinese astrology, there is a twelve-year cycle of animal-named years, and every Mongol knows his or her year’s animal. In fact, rather than asking a person’s age straight out, it is more socially acceptable to ask a person’s astrological sign, and most Mongols can figure out the age of a person from that. The shamanist Mongolian horoscope is published on the Buryat home page on the Internet and can be consulted for favorable dates for shamanist rituals (see chapter 7 notes for Web site address).

A few Mongols and Siberians are also familiar with palm reading. This method was probably learned from the Romany (Gypsies), who are quite common in Siberia, because the interpretations are basically the same. Some people know other uniquely Mongolian interpretations of the hands, viewing the left hand as representative of

past lives, while the markings on the right hand represent the present life.

The Significance of Dreams and Their Relationship to Spirit Travel

Dreams are an important part of the spiritual life of all Mongols. They are often believed to reveal the future and are taken quite seriously. It is common for Mongols to share their dream experiences afterward so that their associates can help to interpret their meaning. A common belief is that if a person dreams during the hour that corresponds to his or her birth year, then that dream is especially significant. For this reason many people check the time when a dream occurred if it seemed to have an important message. Some common dream interpretations are: horses represent luck; white clothing signifies riches; overeating means illness; laughing and drinking bring bad luck; and rivers, the ocean, sun, moon, stars, dragons, snakes, mountains, and important people all signify good luck. Generally, Mongols are disturbed by dreams of dead people, but the interpretation of such dreams is best done by a shaman.³

Shamans are different from most people in that many of them are capable of purposeful dreaming rather than the more common passive receiving of random information. Sometimes a shaman will be requested to dream for a person in order to receive information about a question; naturally this requires the shaman to have the skill of lucid dreaming. Shamans will also dream in order to get information from the spirits regarding how and when a certain ritual should be done. In some cases the initiatory vision of the shaman will take place in a dream rather than during trance.

During sleep the *suns* soul is believed to travel out of the body, and it may be visible as a small flying animal such as an insect or bird. This is the time when nonshamans also experience spirit journeying, but most people have very little control over the events and images they see. It is said that when a person sighs during sleep it is a sign that the *suns* is leaving the body. If a person sneezes during sleep it is dangerous because the *suns* will be expelled violently and might not come back in. The fact that the dream experience is the closest that most people come to shamanizing is the reason why dreams are taken to be important messages from the spirit world.

Three Mongolian Fortune-telling Techniques

Card Reading

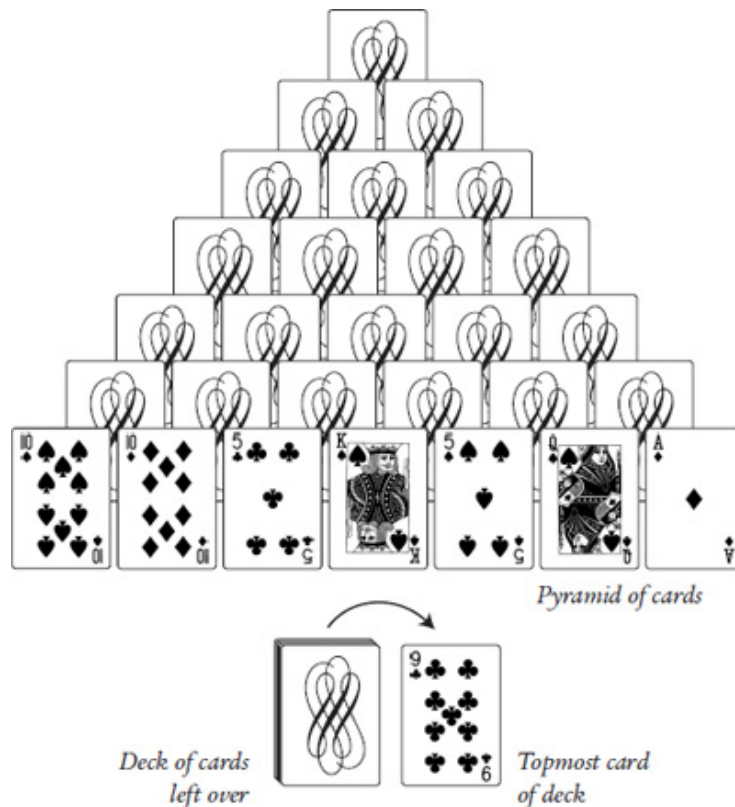
Inner Mongolians and Buryat Mongols use one card-reading method that I have found especially effective. It can be done with normal playing cards or you can use Tarot cards instead. While Mongols generally use regular playing cards, I find that using the Tarot adds an interesting dimension of meaning to this kind of reading. If you use the Tarot you do not use the Major Arcana and the Pages; however, you should designate two cards to be the equivalent of the jokers—I use the Fool and the World as stand-ins for the jokers. This divination method is rather complex in its preparation, but it yields very powerful messages.

1. Making the Spread

The querent should shuffle the cards, thinking about his or her problems until the spirits tell him or her to stop shuffling. The reader will then lay out the cards in the following fashion. Each row should lie on top of the one above it, covering about half of the cards in the row above.

- First row: One card, face down
- Second row: Two cards, face down, half covering the first row
- Third row: Three cards, face down, half covering the second row
- Fourth row: Four cards, face down, half covering the third row
- Fifth row: Five cards, face down, half covering the fourth row
- Sixth row: Six cards, face down, half covering the fifth row
- Seventh row: Seven cards, face up, half covering the sixth row

The cards should be laid out so that the spread looks like a pyramid. The remaining cards should then be laid down as a deck with the top card taken off and placed face up next to it.



2. Taking out the Thirteens

Thirteen is a significant number in Mongolian shamanism, and therefore cards will be removed from the spread and placed in a new pile as pairs adding up to thirteen. For example, an eight and a five lying face up will be removed from the spread and placed in the pile. The cards taken off must always be in pairs adding up to thirteen.

The suit of a card is not important in this method. The cards have the following values:

Ace = 1

Two = 2

Three = 3

Four = 4

Five = 5

Six = 6

Seven = 7

Eight = 8

Nine = 9

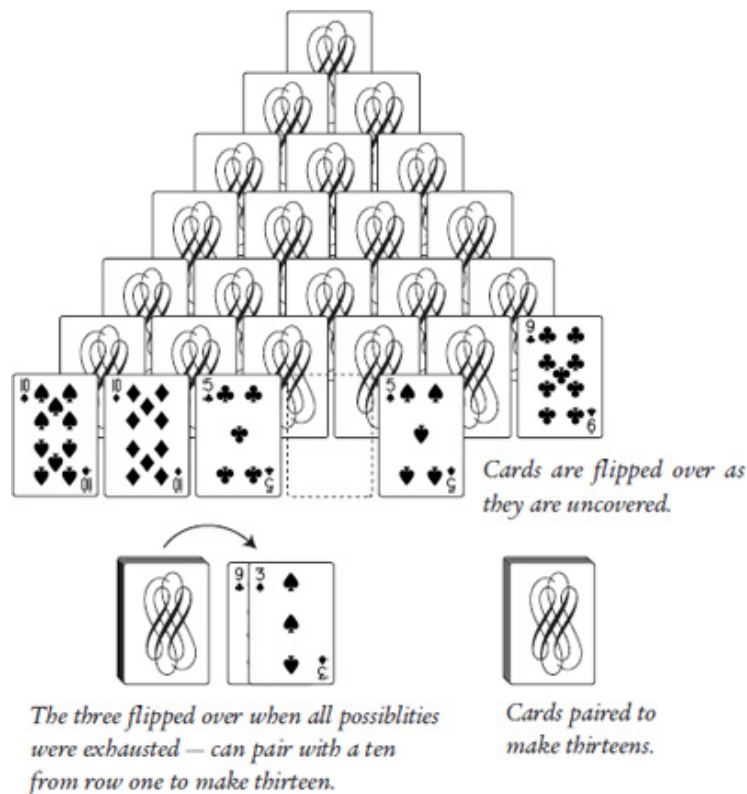
Ten = 10

Jack = 11

Queen = 12

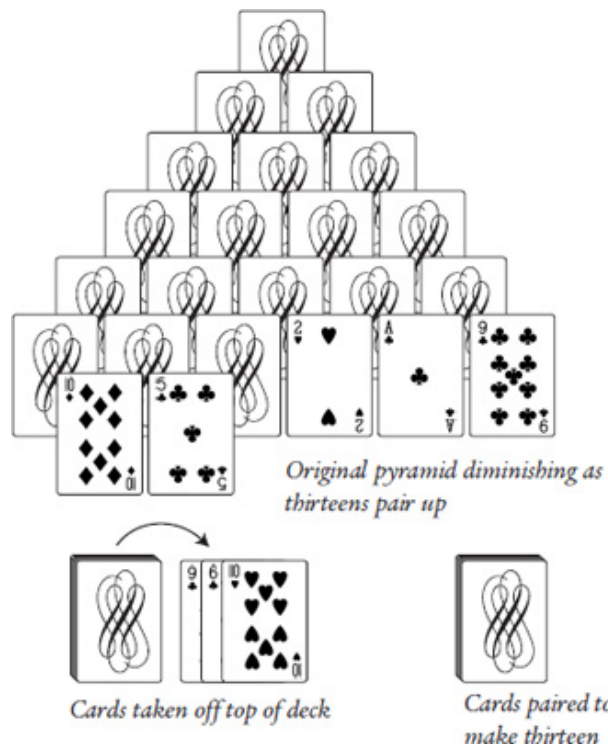
Kings and jokers are equal to thirteen and can be removed as single cards.

Once all the cards lying face up have had the thirteens removed, the cards lying face down that have been uncovered can be flipped over and the thirteens taken from them. The card that has been taken from the deck of unused cards and turned face up can also be used in taking out thirteens by combining it with any other exposed card. Once this card has been used, the top card on the deck of unused cards can be turned over.



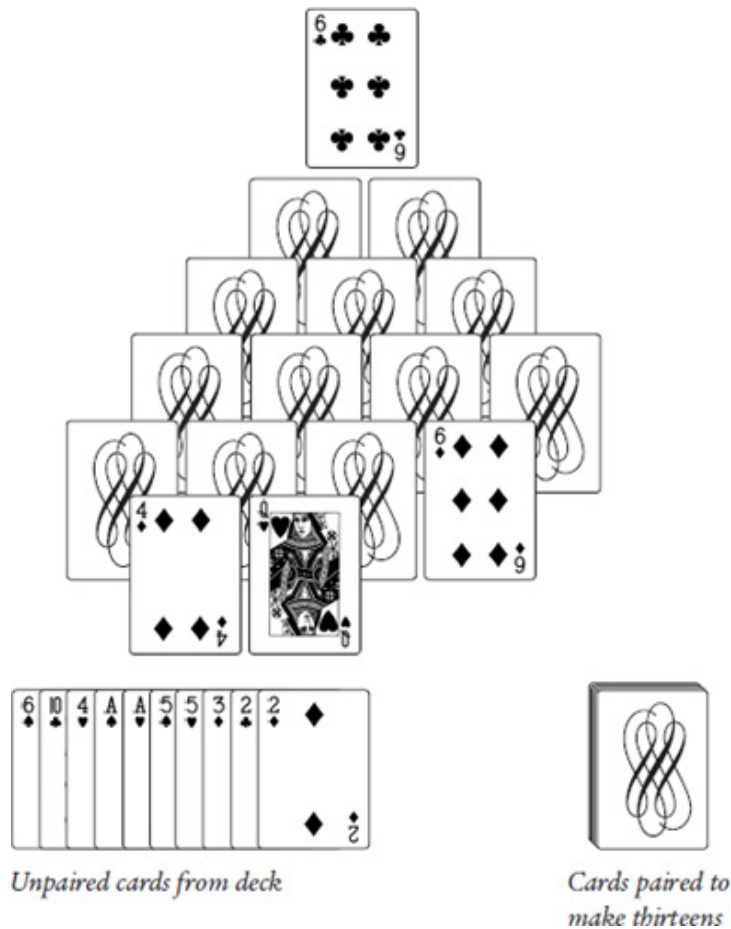
If you become deadlocked and there are no more thirteens lying exposed, you can continue turning over cards from the deck of unused cards until you find something that is usable.

These cards are placed in a row beside the deck of unused cards, going in a line so that the most recently drawn card is placed to the right of the cards that have already been drawn. As new cards are exposed, you can continue to use the cards that are lined up next to the deck of unused cards. There is only one rule: You can only use the leftmost and rightmost cards in this row of used cards.



As cards from the spread are used up, continue flipping over the cards that are exposed when the cards on top of them are removed. If all of the cards in the deck of unused cards have been drawn and the cards in the spread have not been depleted, then you must do the following:

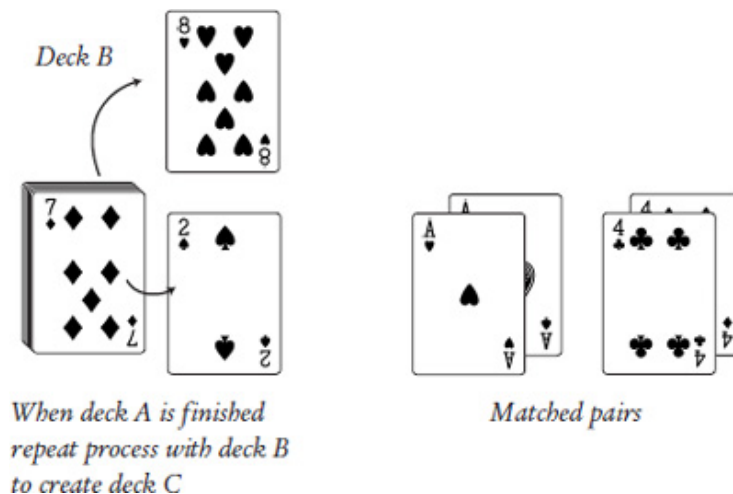
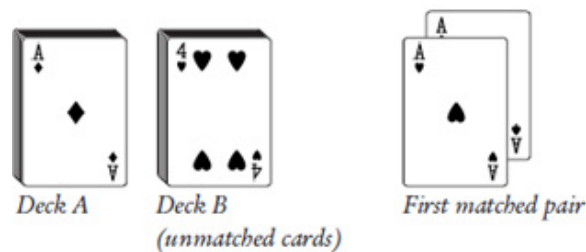
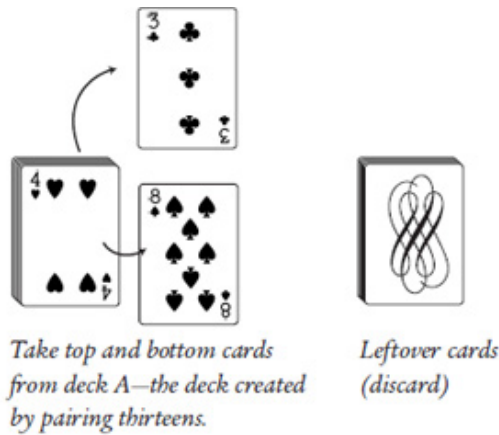
Take the single card from the topmost row of the pyramid and flip it over. If there is nothing to pair it with, go on to the second row and see if there is anything to pair with them. Continue to turn over the remaining cards in the third, then the fourth, and then the fifth row until all cards are turned face up.



Match up and remove any more pairs adding up to thirteen. The unmatched cards are then set aside and are useless for the reading. It is said that if all the cards in the spread are matched up, and none have to be discarded, this is a sign that the spirits are looking very favorably upon the querent. On the other hand, if a large number of cards are discarded, this means that the querent has many obstructions to what he or she wants to do.

3. Finding Matched Pairs

The next step uses the pile of cards (deck A) created by separating out the thirteens. Hold the deck face up and take out the topmost and bottommost cards. Place them in a separate pile (deck B) if they do not have the same value; if they have the same value, place them separately as an individual pair. These cards will be used for the final reading. Continue this sorting process with the bottom and topmost cards in deck A until the deck is depleted, and then repeat the process with deck B. The pile of cards created from the topmost and bottommost cards from deck B that have not been set aside as matched pairs (deck C) will then again be inspected one last time for matched pairs. This process is therefore done three times, with decks A, B, and C.

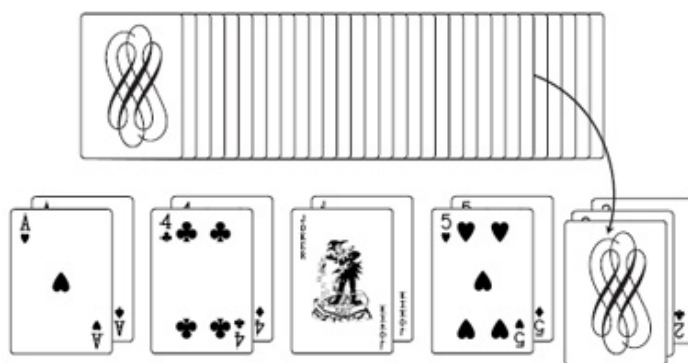


4. The Final Spread

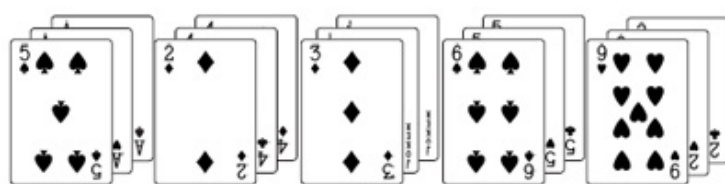
Take the matched pairs and place them in a row going from left to right. Take all of the other cards and hold them as a fan, with the backs of the cards facing the querent. Ask the querent to concentrate and then pick cards from the fan and place one card on each of the matched pairs, face down. You will then flip over the cards, placing each one on top of the pair to which it belongs.

The matched pairs represent strong influences at work in the querent's life. The cards placed on top of them are either favorable, moderating, or negative influences upon what the matched pairs represent. The cards have the following interpretations for the querent:

Leftover cards



Paired cards—a randomly selected card drawn from the leftovers is placed on the top of each pair



Final Spread

1	<i>Zurb</i>	Heart	Affairs of the heart, love, one's self
2	<i>Gerledt</i>	Marriage	Present or future marriage or partnership
3	<i>Medee</i>	Message	An important message will come to you
4	<i>Uchir</i>	Problem	A problem in your life
5	<i>Jaahan Bayar</i>	Small happiness	A good thing is coming soon but is not important
6	<i>Hargii</i>	Way	A way is possible for you to get what you want
7	<i>Uur</i>	Anger	You are blocked by your anger or thwarted because someone is angry with you
8	<i>Eregtei Hun</i>	Man	Yourself, if you are a man; otherwise it means a man will have an important role in your life
9	<i>Hurim</i>	Celebration	There will be an important celebration in your life
10	<i>Ib Bayar</i>	Great happiness	Very good luck
Jack	<i>Muu Hun</i>	Bad man	A person will try to deceive or swindle you
Queen	<i>Emegtei Hun</i>	Woman	If you are a woman, yourself; otherwise a woman will be an important influence on you
King	<i>Buyantai Hun</i>	Blessed man	You know or will meet somebody who will bring great fortune and happiness to you
Joker	<i>Xamag Ulziitei</i>	Greatest luck	Great blessing and happiness for you; luck no matter which other cards it goes with. The luckiest spread of all has a pair of Jokers

A Sample Reading

A friend of mine wanted me to ask the spirits if he ought to continue a relationship with the girl he wanted to marry or break it off. I made the following reading:

During the separating of the thirteens all of the cards were perfectly matched and none were left to be discarded. This is a very rare occurrence. This means that there are powerful spiritual forces at work in this man's life.

First pair: Two queens, covered by king

If these two people were married, my friend would bring great happiness and fortune into this woman's life.

Second pair: Two eights, covered by king

He is capable of being an ideal husband for this woman, since eight represents himself and the king is the best that he is able to be.

Third pair: Two fives, covered by ten

In the near future one good thing of small importance (the two fives) and one good thing of great importance (the ten) will come to him.

Fourth pair: Two twos, covered by two

Three twos are a potent sign that marriage is very likely for this couple.

Fifth pair: Two nines, covered by six

A way is open for him to have a celebration (most likely marriage) in the future.

Sixth pair: Two sevens, covered by three

He will soon receive a message that someone is very angry with him. This message is probably from someone opposed to his marrying his girlfriend.

Seventh pair: Two aces, covered by six

Aces represent the heart, so this means that a way will manifest itself for him to achieve his heart's desire (to marry this woman).

Eighth pair: Two jacks, covered by two

Two represents marriage, but the jacks represent deception. This means that there may be trouble with the husband and wife being open and honest with each other.

Ninth pair: Two threes, covered by seven

The threes mean that he will receive an important message from someone who is angry with him. This may represent the message in the sixth pair, or it may represent another person opposed to his marriage.

Tenth pair: Two nines, covered by five

This is another very unusual occurrence. In this spread two pairs of nines were drawn (see fifth pair), and nine is another very powerful number in Mongolian shamanism. This means that a marriage celebration is almost certain in his future. This pair has a bit of a warning, however: the happiness from the wedding may not be of very long duration.

The number of matched pairs in this reading was unusually high; on average about three or four will come out, and sometimes only one pair. The high number of pairs and the absence of discarded cards mean potent spiritual forces are at work. Looking at the spread all together the following message emerges:

1. His future marriage to his girlfriend is likely, and even though there are current troubles, there is a way to work beyond them. Marriage is very strongly indicated in several places.
2. One or more people oppose their getting married and will be angry if they do so.
3. While he is an ideal husband for this woman, there appears to be some lack of honesty on her part.
4. If they cannot be open and honest with each other the marriage will not be a happy one.

Divination with Nine Coins

Divining with nine coins is still a popular fortune-telling method in Mongolia today. The method described here was traditionally done with old Mongolian copper coins that are thin and worn. Other coins may be used, but the best alternative is using old pennies, since worn copper coins shuffle best. Most importantly, the coins being used must have a “heads” side and “tails” side.

To start the reading the person being read for should hold the coins for a short time to charge them with his or her energy. You will then shake the coins between your hands as if you are preparing to roll dice. When you feel you have shuffled the coins enough, arrange them into a stack on your right palm. It is preferable not to look at the stack as you make it. Then turn the stack over into your left hand so that the uppermost coin on the stack in your right palm will be on the bottom when it is turned over onto your left palm. You will then read starting from the top. You will read until the faces of the coins change; that is, if the stack starts with heads, go down the stack until you reach a coin showing tails; if it starts with tails, go down the stack until you reach a coin with the heads side up. For instance, if the two topmost coins are heads you will look up the entry for two heads. The rest of the coins are unnecessary and may be discarded.



Divination coins (zoohon) and pebbles (haira Shuluun) used for rock divination. The coins are Manchu dynasty Chinese, some over 200 years old.

Here are both the traditional and modern interpretations of each of the eighteen different readings of the coins. (If no modern interpretation is mentioned it is because the modern meaning is still the same as the traditional meaning.)

1 head: White arrow

Wishes will be granted; peace at home; business will be successful; profits will be found; disease will be healed; rituals will be successful; luck in finding mate; honor; finding what is lost. Listen for important news from the southern direction.

1 tail: Black arrow

Business will be difficult; no friends; lost livestock is close by; success in hunting; lack of motivation; danger of illness. In the modern interpretation this also means that what the querent wants is close at hand but he or she needs to work harder to achieve it.

2 heads: White mountain

Business will be successful; great strength; lack of fear; disease will be healed; runaway animals are close to home and can be found; if the querent camps at a place with water there will be many visitors. In the modern interpretation this also means that the querent is likely to get what he or she wants with little effort, and the querent should cultivate friends to get help with what is desired.

2 tails: Black mountain

Success in hunting; lost animals will be found, but with difficulty. There will be news from a man riding a dark brown horse.

Danger of chronic illness; beware of bad water; success in lawsuits. In the modern interpretation this also means hidden enemies are working against querent; also, he or she must be careful not to eat spoiled food or drink.

3 heads: White boat

Success in finding business partner or friend; arrival of guests; victory over enemies; quick recovery from illness; winning lawsuits; a man with a white horse will give good advice for finding lost animals. In the modern interpretation this also means that a person older than the querent or of high status will be available for help.

3 tails: Black boat

All things will go the wrong way; disease will worsen; lost animals are far away or killed by predators; danger of eye disease; a man with black clothes and a black horse will bring news of lost animals. In the modern interpretation this also means that whatever the querent wants is hopeless and should be forgotten.

4 heads: White lion

Success in business; profits; luck in hunting; victory over enemies; quick recovery from illness. Good news from the southern direction.

4 tails: Black lion

If illness develops, recovery will be slow. Consecrate an animal to the spirits of the earth and waters. Business and rituals will be successful. Luck in hunting; if there are legal problems, a friend will help. News about lost animals from the west. Also, important news will come from a religious person or a rich man. In the modern interpretation this also means that a shaman should be called to correct illness, and important news will come from the western direction. If something is lost, the lost object has moved in a westward direction from the place it was last seen.

5 heads: White wolf

A friend will help in business; victory over enemies; success in hunting. A ritual is needed to protect against illness.

5 tails: Black wolf

Success in business; friends will help; victory over enemies; querent will find profit, inheritance, or treasure; good hunting;

guests leaving is good; guests coming is unlucky; things arrive on time; there is danger of a difficult illness; lost things will not be found; and there may be a reason for a quarrel. Do a fire ceremony.

6 heads: White sun

Slow recovery from illness; lost animals will be found in a week; travel in any direction is good; friends help in business; luck in hunting, but horse might get sick or injured. In the modern interpretation this also means that what the querent wants will happen in a week, and there is a danger of an accident or the breakdown of a car.

6 tails: Black sun

Generally not good; illness will come quickly; no help from friends; no profit; no success in group hunt; news about lost animals from southwest; news from a woman; horse may get sick. In the modern interpretation this also means that business partners are not reliable or are incompetent; danger of car breakdown.

7 heads: White raven

News will come quickly from the south from a man riding a spotted horse; lost animals will be caught quickly; luck in group hunting; quick recovery from illness; visitors bring luck; and lawsuits will turn out well. In the modern interpretation this also means that a very unusual or important person will bring news from the southern direction; business partners are reliable; success will come quickly.

7 tails: Black raven

There is some kind of bad rumor about the querent. Lost animals are to the east. Animals may become ill or be killed by predators. In the modern interpretation this also means that there is a danger of theft or major financial setback. Lost things are east of where they were last seen.

8 heads: White moon

All things successful; people come on time; lost things are found quickly; profits; things will be sold; recovery from disease.

8 tails: Black moon

Everything difficult; no help from friends; difficult illness; lost animals are to the southwest; news from a person of good

character; horse may get sick. In the modern interpretation this also means that lost objects are southwest of where they were last seen; danger of car breakdown.

9 heads: White cup

Everything will be successful and happen at the right time; good for travel and health; lost things will be found.

9 tails: Black cup

All things are difficult; danger to life; no friends; lost things will not be found; there will be success in hunting. Do a ritual to call helper spirits (*sahius*).

Fortune-telling with Shagai

This is also one of the more popular divination methods among Mongols. *Shagai* are sheep anklebones, roughly cubical in form, that are used for all kinds of games in Mongolia, so every household has them. If you are not able to obtain a set of *shagai* from Mongolia, in other countries you may obtain them from a butcher who sells lamb meat. Also, an alternative to *shagai* can be made very easily from wood.

Making Wooden Shagai

These instruction are for making wooden pieces that work like *shagai*; in fact, these wooden cubes are even used in Mongolia for some games. You will need a saw and a piece of wood (square in cross section) or stick about one-half inch in diameter. The piece of wood or stick should be whittled or sanded so that there are four sides or faces. Cut the wood into segments about one inch long; you will need four pieces in all. The ends do not need to be perfectly flat since these “sides” are not used for divination. On the four faces of each piece write or paint the words *sheep*, *goat*, *camel*, and *horse*. The other two sides can be left blank.

Should you be able to obtain real *shagai*, the four sides are different from each other and mean the following:

Sheep: rounded, humplike side

Goat: indented side

Camel: Has an S-like swirl on it

Horse: Like camel, but the S pattern is not as pronounced



Divination bones (shagai) with leather pouch decorated with badger fur.

The two pointed ends are called “cow,” but are not used for divination.

When doing divination you should shake the four *shagai* between your hands and then cast them on the ground or tabletop as if you are rolling dice. If any of the *shagai* land on end, roll the *shagai* again. The possible combinations are interpreted as follows:

4 horses: Durvun berhiin deed tulug.

The most fortunate omen from *shagai*; good luck and success.

4 camels: Hussen buhen saadgui butne.

All that is desired will be accomplished easily.

4 sheep: Urt udaan ulziitei.

Luck will come after a long time.

4 goats: Busadiin yag ujigtai.

Everything will happen very slowly (slowest omen).

3 horses, 1 camel: Hurdan orno.

It will come quickly.

3 horses, 1 sheep: Saadgui.

No difficulties.

3 horses, 1 goat: Tegsh sain.

Balanced, straight, and good outcome.

2 horses, 1 camel, 1 sheep: Bayartai sain.

Happy and good outcome.

2 horses, 1 sheep, 1 goat: Ulziitei sain.

Lucky and good outcome.

2 horses, 1 camel, 1 goat: Alsiin uil turgen butne.

Future things will develop quickly.

2 horses, 2 camels: Uils butemjtei.

All things will be successful.

2 horses, 2 sheep: Ajil uils saadgui.

There will be no difficulty in doing work.

2 horses, 2 goats: Uil butemj murgulduuntei.

Conflicting goals; success in something not most desired.

1 horse, 3 camels: Udaan bayartai.

Happiness will come slowly.

1 horse, 3 sheep: Uurriin tald (sawand bat).

You must do it yourself.

1 horse, 3 goats: Sagaan hel amtai.

There will be a minor argument.

1 horse, 2 camels, 1 sheep: Ed eswel hel am irne.

Dispute, argument.

1 horse, 1 camel, 2 sheep: Esreg taliin sawand buuna.

Opposition.

1 horse, 1 camel, 2 goats: Esen mend udaan jargana.

Health will improve slowly.

1 horse, 2 sheep, 1 goat: Hereg yawdal saadgui.

Business or other affairs will have no difficulties.

1 horse, 2 camels, 1 goat: Hel sain taldaa bayartai.

Good, happy news.

1 horse, 1 camel, 1 sheep, 1 goat: Terguun tulug mashid sain.

Fortunate omen; completely good whatever it is.

2 camels, 1 sheep, 1 goat: Buteh eseh ergelzeetei.

Success is doubtful.

2 camels, 2 sheep: Uuriin tald bolowch emgegtei.

Chronic illness.

2 camels, 2 goats: Saadgui.

No difficulties.

1 camel, 2 sheep, 1 goat: Uils butemj dund zereg zangaltai bus.

Not too many difficulties, but some.

1 camel, 1 sheep, 2 goats: Busadiin talbart bolno.

It will happen in a different place from where it was supposed to happen.

1 camel, 3 sheep: Gadniin nuluugui.

No outside influences.

1 camel, 3 goats: Uil butemj muu.

Bad omen for success; failure probable.

3 sheep, 1 goat: Uil butemj sain taldaa baina.

Success is probable.

2 sheep, 2 goats: Hereg butex bolno.

The affair will be completed.

1 sheep, 3 goats: Uils butehgui.

It cannot be done.

Chapter 7

Mongolian Shamanism Today

Thanks to the embrace of high Heaven
And widely spread Mother Earth, a hurai!
Thanks to the rays of the golden sun
And radiance of the silver moon, a hurai!
Thanks to the wealth of our native land
And the udder of our Earth, a hurai!
Thanks to clean streams of running water
And tips of growing grass, a hurai!
Thanks to the flames of the hot fire
And foundation of four altars, a hurai!
There is boundless wealth
And great happiness, a hurai!

—Shaman prayer for the *dallaga*,
Buryat Mongols, from Bashkuyev,
The Buryats: Traditions and Culture



Although this book has been a rather brief introduction to the shamanism of Siberia and Mongolia from a practical viewpoint, I hope that those of you reading it who are practicing shamans will be able to use this material for your own personal growth as well as for the good fortune, health, and happiness of all with whom you work. I and many others here in Siberia and Mongolia have the firm belief that the revival of shamanism in world culture is an important step toward establishing a better future for mankind. Even if you are not a practicing shaman, I hope that you will feel a greater reverence for heaven and earth after being exposed to the ideas presented in these pages.

The Revival of Shamanism in Mongolia and Siberia

Shamanism today is experiencing a tremendous revival both in Mongolia and Siberia. Shamanism was repressed to a certain extent by Russian Christians and Buddhist lamas in the last few centuries, and the twentieth century has been a time of great trial for shamanism and for Siberian and Mongolian cultures in general. Many shamans were arrested, tortured, and executed by the regimes of Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, and the Mongolian dictator Choibalsan, and after fifty years of Communist hegemony in Siberia and Mongolia, shamanism was believed by many to have been pretty well stamped out. But this was not true; shamanism had only been driven underground, and shamans continued to practice in secret in many places. Since the fall of Communism in Russia and Mongolia, shamans are once more free to practice and they have regained a position of respect in their communities.

In Mongolia today, for example, there are over 360 shamans in all parts of the country, all of whom have inherited *udha* spirits from old lineages. In Buryatia and in other parts of Siberia, similarly large numbers of shamans have reemerged, and in addition, many new shamans have been called by the spirits. It's very likely that in a few years the number of shamans in the native Siberian and Mongolian populations will approach the levels that existed before the start of their

persecution. What is even more significant, however, is that seventy years of Communist suppression of religion never managed to extinguish the shamanist faith in people's hearts. Even the most secularized Mongol will still flick liquor to heaven, earth, and the ancestors and stop at an *oboo* to place a stone on it and walk around it three times.

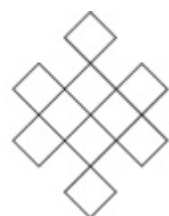
Shamanist beliefs are so tightly woven into the fabric of native Siberian and Mongolian cultures that the current revival is not unexpected. It has been said that every Mongol is shamanist to a certain degree, consciously or not. All of the shamans that I am acquainted with have more than their share of work to do; they are constantly being asked to perform healings and other tasks, and the demand for shamans' services seems to grow even as the number of practicing shamans is growing. The commemoration of Geser (Bukhe Beligte Tenger) from 1990 to 1995 resulted in the building of several new shamanist shrines throughout the Buryat lands in Buryatia, Ust-Orda, and Aga, and these shrines are visited constantly by the local populations. In Buryatia and Ust-Orda several new shamans' organizations have appeared in the last few years, and shamans meet regularly to do group rituals. In Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, the Golomt Center for Shamanist Studies, established in 1996, is striving to establish a similar organization of Mongolian shamans. In Tuva, Yakutia, the Altai Republic, and other Siberian areas the revival of shamanism is likewise proceeding apace.¹

Sun and Moon, *Ulzii*, *Soyombo*, *Has Temdeg*, and Other Sacred Symbols

There are several sacred symbols in Mongolian shamanism that are used in everyday life and, even more importantly, for any kind of shamanist drawings, especially rock paintings and *ongons*.

The most fundamental symbol is the *soyombo*, the symbol of sun, moon, and fire. It is not a coincidence that every Mongolian flag, whether in Mongolia, Buryatia, or in other Mongolian areas, has always used this symbol. The *soyombo* represents the origin of the Mongolian people. It shows the

crescent moon with its horns pointing up holding the disk of the sun, topped by three flames of fire. This symbol represents the Mongolian people in every place where they live. Some Mongols say that the fire and sun represent man, while the moon represents woman. The three flames represent the past, present, and future, and also once decorated the *sulde*, the battle standard of Chinggis Khan. On the Mongolian national flag the *soyombo* is extended further with a pattern of two vertical bars, within which are two triangles and the yinyang symbol. The two vertical bars represent the strength of friendship, that two friends are stronger than walls of stone. The triangles above and below the yin-yang symbol represent justice. The Mongolian yin-yang symbol is somewhat different from its counterparts in other Asian countries, for each of the two parts has eyes. This is because in the Mongolian tradition this symbol represents two fish. Fish never sleep; their eyes are always open. In fact, on many Mongolian battle flags, the yin-yang symbol is represented by two fish. The meaning is that like fish who never sleep, the people always watch out for each other. The overall meaning of the *soyombo* is that the people are bound together by loyalty and justice and take care of one another at all times.



ULZII



HATAN SUIH



KHAN SUIH



ZOOSON KHEE



HAS TEMDEG



SOYOMBO

The Mongolian *has temdeg* symbol has been terribly abused in history. The *has temdeg* is probably one of the oldest in Siberian tradition, and it was also used by Native Americans in the southwestern United States until World War Two. This symbol is controversial because it resembles the swastika, but its meaning is important in shamanism and has no relation to

the evil use of the symbol by the Nazis. Even in Mongolia and Siberia the use of this symbol was controversial after its abuse by the Germans. The resemblance is superficial, however, for the shamanist *has temdeg* is aligned straight, while the swastika used by the Nazis was rotated 45 degrees.

The *has temdeg* represents the Big Dipper (*Doloon Obgon*) as it moves around the sky. The Big Dipper rotates around the Pole Star, Polaris, and when it points to the north, east, south, and west directions it becomes the *has temdeg* symbol. The stars of the *Doloon Obgon* are believed to have an important influence over the destiny of each person. For this reason an individual's birth year corresponds to a certain star within the constellation, and people will perform shamanist rituals to the stars to influence their fate.² In Chinggis Khan's time, and later as well, the *has temdeg* was considered a sacred shamanist symbol, and it is most unfortunate that it has been imbued with evil meanings that have nothing to do with its use. At the time of the Mongolian Empire this symbol adorned the seals of Chinggis Khan and the other Mongolian khans.

The *ulzii* is another important symbol for Mongols and other Siberian peoples. It represents the eternal knot, good fortune, and the unending cycle of birth, death, and renewal. In Mongolian lands the *ulzii* is used not only for decorating houses but will be found decorating almost every type of item. While the *ulzii* with four squares in the center is most common, there are variations with up to thirty-two squares within the knot. Such knotwork designs that have no ends are common in Mongolian folk art because of the relationship between shamanism and the idea of rebirth.

The moon and sun are commonly portrayed in Mongolian paintings, especially ones for religious use. In a Mongolian painting the moon will always appear on the left, or female, side, while the sun will appear on the right, or male, side. Both are normally shown with rays radiating out to the four directions, similar to the Native American sun symbol.

The *hatan suih* and *khan suih* are associated with marriage and family. These symbols adorn all sorts of Mongolian items, reflecting the central role that family plays in Mongolian

society. The *hatan suih* is associated with women; it consists of two diamond shapes with lines extending out to the four directions overlapping each other. The *khan suih*, associated with men, consists of two circles, with lines extending out to the four directions overlapping each other. These symbols also adorn Mongolian and Buryat wedding rings and other items associated with marriage and family. The overlapping of the two symbols representing the four directions represents the overlapping of the husband and wife's personal worlds when they merge in order to create a family. The circle or diamond with markings denoting the four directions represents the soul sphere, which is oriented within the four directions. (See the exercise for visualizing the spiritual body at the end of chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of the soul sphere.)

Another common symbol is the windhorse, *hiimori*, which represents personal psychic energy. Windhorse is portrayed as a winged horse, sometimes with the *soyombo* on its back. This symbol now appears in the coat of arms of free Mongolia. In Buryatia this symbol sometimes appears as a centaur, with the body of a Buryat man in traditional costume in front and the winged body of the horse behind him.

The *han garid*, the thunderbird, appears frequently in Mongolian and Buryat art. It is an eaglelike creature with a snake held in its mouth. This kind of birds obscures the sun when it spreads its wings and is said to be capable of flying into outer space. The *han garid* is also the symbol of the city of Ulaanbaatar. It is a rather interesting coincidence that the eagle with the snake in its mouth is a sacred symbol of the Aztecs as well and appears on the Mexican flag.

The *zooson khee* symbol is derived from the Chinese *lianz* character, which signifies long life. The design, however, was adopted by the Mongols in ancient times and given a different meaning. In Mongolian culture it represents the four directions and the cosmos as it is represented in the Mongol *ger*. Many variations of this symbol can be seen in Mongolia, Buryatia, and Tuva.^{[3](#)}



Portrayed as a winged horse, the windhorse (hiimori), represents personal psychic energy.

Special Holidays in Mongolian Shamanism

There are a few days in the year, all based on the lunar calendar, that are considered especially important in Mongolian shamanism. The New Year Festival, known as Sagaalgaṅ, or Tsagaan Sar, is the most important holiday of the year and lasts for two weeks, from the rising of the new moon of the first month until it becomes full. Sagaalgaṅ is usually the second new moon after the winter solstice. In Mongolian lands, Sagaalgaṅ marks the breaking of the winter cold and the gradual warming of the weather over the following moon cycle. This moon roughly corresponds to the month of February, give or take a week. A description of the traditional customs for this festival concludes this chapter.

The second most important festival is Ulaan Tergel, which is the full moon closest to the summer solstice; it usually falls around June 20. In Buryatia the Surharban, which comprises several days of traditional Mongolian games, takes place at this time. Some types of nature spirits are believed to be active only during the day from Ulaan Tergel until the third full moon following it. For this reason, some shamanic rituals can be held during the day only during those three moons, while during the rest of the year they must be held at night. Some Mongolian groups also do an *oboo* ritual at Ulaan Tergel in order to gain prosperity for the clan and good rainfall.

Another traditional festival celebrates the return of migratory birds and is usually held at the time when the cuckoo first starts calling in the forest. This corresponds to the full moon in the

month of May. In Buryatia, the Hongoodor Buryats, who claim to be descended from a swan woman, would make special offerings of dairy foods to the white birds at this time.

The third moon after Ulaan Tergel also used to be called the White Moon, and this is the time of the harvest in Mongolia. The “white” refers to the abundance of dairy foods, which are called *sagaan ideen* (white foods) in Mongolian. In ancient times this marked the beginning of the year for the Mongols, and the moving of the beginning of the year to late winter occurred in the medieval period during the time of the Mongolian Empire.

Many clans have their own special festivals according to the local deities that they worship. In Buryatia, several communal sacrifices, or *tailgans*, would be held during the summer to honor various mountain spirits. Throughout Mongolia, shamanic rituals or sacrifices may be held at any time they are needed.

Resources on Siberian and Mongolian Shamanism

Several sources of information on Siberian and Mongolian shamanism are available. Unfortunately, some of the best books are in Russian and Mongolian, but there is a fairly good listing of English-language books in the bibliography. Many of these books and articles also have excellent bibliographies, but many of the sources are difficult to find and one might need to visit a university library to obtain them. In general, the shamanic literature with regard to Siberia is still rather small in the English language. In the last few years a handful of Siberians have visited the United States. One is Olga Kharitidi, a Russian physician who has published a book entitled *Entering the Circle* about her experiences with Altai shamans. Another is Nadia Stepanova, a Buryat shamaness, who has issued a videocassette called “Nadia Stepanova, Buryatian Shaman.”⁴

Books

There are a few books that I can recommend without reservation. I assume that many are familiar with Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman*; it has some material about Siberian and Mongolian shamanism. *Shamans and Elders* by Caroline Humphrey and Urgunge Onon is an anthropological study of the Dagur Mongols. At the time I read it I had already developed the main ideas presented in this book, and it was a pleasant surprise to see the many parallels between Humphrey's ideas and my own. Her main source, Urgunge Onon, offers many memorable statements about shamanism, some of which I have quoted in this book. S. M. Shirokogoroff's *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* is a rare book with a rather intimidating title, but it is a gold mine of information about Siberian shamanism and ritual techniques. Vilmos Diöszegi's *Tracing Shamans in Siberia* is a wonderful book, not only for its information about shamanism but also because it is a very colorful and entertaining travelogue. Jeremiah Curtin's *A Journey in Southern Siberia* is also interesting, but it contains many errors, mostly because of the writer's lack of access to a good interpreter. I was put off by some rather racist remarks about the Buryats by the author (an American gentleman of the Victorian era), but if that part is overlooked, the book provides a rare glimpse into the shamanism of the Buryats before its repression by the Communists.

Resources on the World Wide Web

In addition to the addresses for the Golomt and Buryat Home Pages given in note 1 of this chapter, the Internet offers a few other sources of information. The ShamanSouth site offers many interesting connections to sources on shamanism. The Shamanism Web Ring, of which the Buryat home page is a member, offers hours worth of browsing and interesting material. The Foundation for Shamanic Studies, Michael Harner's organization, is also a good starting point for any Web search on shamanism. The Mongolia Society, based at Indiana University, has many interesting books and journals available, including the first study of Mongolian shamanism written by an ethnic Mongol scholar, entitled *Shamanism, or the Black Faith among the Mongols*, by Dorji Banzarov (translated into

English). The Mongolia Society can be contacted at monsoc@indiana.edu.

Another resource that will become increasingly available is workshops on Mongolian and Siberian shamanism. Since 1998, representatives of the Golomt Center have been visiting the United States to conduct workshops. Olga Kharatidi lives in the United States, and Nadia Stepanova visits the United States and Europe on a regular basis. In addition, the Foundation for Shamanic Studies has been bringing Tuvan shamans to the United States and Europe for workshops. Be sure to watch the various Web pages listed above for upcoming events.

Travel

If you are capable of traveling to Mongolia or Siberia, there are plenty of opportunities to meet shamans and to visit shamanist shrines. The Golomt Center in Ulaanbaatar is planning to hold various events and workshops. There are also shaman associations based in Ulan-Ude and Ust-Orda in Buryatia that can be contacted through the Golomt Center. If you have the funds to be able to travel to Huvsgul Aimag, a visit to the Darhat Mongols is worthwhile. Their shamans are some of the most famous in Mongolia, and in Huvsgul there is a shamanist shrine in a cave that is sacred to Dayan Derkhe Tenger, patron *tenger* of Mongolian shamans. When you travel in Mongolia you will see many places where *oboos* have been erected. These usually are about ten feet (three meters) high and are made of rocks with tree branches and various offerings stuck into them. Be sure to stop, add a few rocks, and honor the spirit, for it will ensure you good luck on your trip! Also, while in Mongolian lands, watch out for *ongon mod* and *barisaa*, which are trees decorated with ribbons, each ribbon representing a prayer to the master spirit of the tree. It is a good idea to keep some small change, tobacco, or *bud*, strips of cloth, handy for offerings at shamanist sacred sites. In Ulaanbaatar there are *oboos* at the four sacred mountains as well as several within the city itself.

For the truly adventurous, visits to the various shrines to Bukhe Beligte Tenger in Buryatia can be quite exciting, especially the shrine in the Sayan Mountains. There is also a

beautiful shrine to this *tenger* just outside of Ulan-Ude, called the Geseriin Buuts, which will become in the future the centerpiece of a complex dedicated to the study of Buryat culture. The Khangalov Museum in Ulan-Ude has quite a few shamanist artifacts in their collection, and if you are in Ulan-Ude, the Ethnographic Museum is also a must-see. In the museum there is a reconstructed Evenk camp of tepees, including the shaman's tepee, which is surrounded by several huge wooden *ongons* and a representation of the World River. Inside are all of the shaman's implements and several more *ongons*, some of which are still quite powerful. There are also several traditional Buryat wooden *gers*, which resemble Navajo hogans, and these contain various shamanist artifacts as well. If you have an interpreter, the farmer's market in Ulan-Ude is a good place for purchasing herbs such as thyme, fir, sage, *dali* (wild rhododendron), and juniper that are used in shamanic rituals.

The island of Olkhon in Lake Baikal is one of the most powerful shamanist sites in all of Mongolia, and its shamans are legendary. Large rituals are held there in the summer. Valentin Hagdaev, a young male shaman and the president of the local shamans' association, oversees a museum there and is very willing to talk about shamanism. It is said that if one drums at sunrise on August 1 on Olkhon one will receive a message from the ancestors. In Ust-Orda the shamans' group drums together at every full moon; contact the Golomt Center for details.

Traveling to Mongolia is fairly easy for most Americans and Europeans at this time, and no invitation is required for stays of less than thirty days. An increasingly large number of Mongols speak English because it is taught in high school, and an English-speaking visitor will have very little difficulty. Traveling to Siberia requires an invitation, and getting around is a little more difficult unless one knows Russian or Mongolian or has an interpreter. Invitations can be obtained from the Russian agency Intourist through better travel agents. If one is seriously considering going to Siberia there is an excellent book that explains all that one needs to know for such a trip called *The Lake Baikal Guidebook* by Arthur D. Pedersen

and Susan E. Oliver. A website devoted to the guidebook and to tourism at Lake Baikal in general exists at www.baikal.eastsib.ru.⁵

A Final Word

May this book bring you greater knowledge and blessing. As time goes by it is my intention to publish more books of ritual work, healing techniques, divination techniques, and other useful material for the practicing shaman. The Mongolian-Siberian path has been most rewarding for me, and it is my sincere hope that it will enrich your own experience as well. I shall conclude this little book with an invocation for you, my readers:

May Father Heaven, Mother Earth, the spirits of the
ancestors,

Tenger of the four directions, all the *ongon* spirits,

Master spirits of the forests, rocks, mountains, and waters,

Spirits of all living things

Bayan Ulgen, Bayan Ahaa, Erleg Khan,

Bukhe Beligte Tenger, Han Hormasta, Etseg Malaan
Tenger,

Uha Loson, Alma Mergen Hatan, and all the *lus* spirits,

The thirty three *baatar* and Buh Noyon Baabai,

Umai Burhan, Tatai Tenger, the *zayaans* and all the other
great spirits

Bring you blessing and power in all that you do!

Hurai! Hurai! Hurai!

Hurai! Hurai! Hurai!

Hurai! Hurai! Hurai!



Ritual for the White Moon (Sagaalga)

It is traditional among Mongols and Buryats to celebrate the White Moon Festival two lunar months after the new moon

following the winter solstice. This usually falls on the same date as the Chinese New Year, but you may want to check one of the recommended Mongolian web sites to be sure the date is correct, because the Mongolian and Chinese calendars are slightly different. This is the beginning of the spring season in the Mongolian homeland, but it also has great significance from a shamanic standpoint. It is a time when all negative influences are cleansed, old injuries forgotten, and everything starts anew. In the tradition of Sagaalgaṅ no two people, even if they have had grudges or conflict in the old year, can show hostility or anger toward one another during the two weeks from the rising of the White Moon until the White Moon becomes full. This is an important custom that allows for people to heal old conflicts and be reconciled with one another.

The day preceding Sagaalgaṅ, Bituun, is the day when all the spirits go to the upper world. Bituun comes from the word *bituuleh*, which means “to stop up.” This is related to the fact that on Bituun all spirits are in the upper world and cannot be called upon for shamanic work. In fact, the last moon cycle preceding Sagaalgaṅ is a period when the spirits are rather difficult to reach because they are spending much of their time in the upper world, and Mongolian shamans generally shun doing anything but extremely urgent rituals at this time. During Bituun it is considered unlucky to travel far from home because the protection of the spirits is absent. From sunset on Bituun until sunrise on the morning of the White Moon festival the shamans’ helper spirits are in the upper world. In the evening on Bituun, Mongols usually gather together as families to eat, drink, and prepare the customary foods for the White Moon festival.

On the night of Bituun, all the spirits are in the upper world. Their ascension into space is a time of cleansing, and they will return energized and free of all the cares and blockages of the past year. At the very time when the new moon rises, they will descend back down to earth, and this is one of the most powerful times of the entire year for shamanic work. For this reason I offer here a short but effective ritual used by Mongols for the White Moon. This ritual should be performed outside, weather permitting, since it involves the building of a fire.

Things Needed for Ritual:

- Firewood and other materials for making fire
- Stick incense
- Juniper or sage (optional)

To prepare, you should pile up a mound of snow or dirt fairly close to where you will build the fire. It does not need to be excessively big, but it should be shaped like a small mountain. This is the *tengeriin oboo*, and the spirits will be attracted to it when they descend. *Oboos* are places of contact between earth and the upper world in the spiritual plane; their height is not so important as the fact that they are made, and spirits will use them as a passageway from heaven to earth. You should place fourteen sticks of incense, seven for the seven stars of the Big Dipper (Doloon Uvged) and seven for the seven stars of the Pleiades (Mushin), into the top of the mound and keep them lit as long as the ritual lasts. The spirits of these fourteen stars are considered to have great influence over people's fate. Next to the *tengeriin oboo* you should light the fire. The fire is significant for two reasons. Like the *oboo*, a ceremonial fire is also a contact between heaven and earth and symbolizes the center of the world; second, Mongols believe that the spirits like to warm themselves at the fire after they have descended from the coldness of space.

You should have the fire and the incense lit before the rising of the White Moon. While lighting the fire and the incense, prepare yourself mentally for the White Moon by meditating on how the rising of the White Moon and the return of the spirits will bring cleansing and new beginnings to your life. You may either sit or circle the fire and *oboo* in a large sunwise circle with both the fire and the *oboo* inside the circle. If it helps, drum, rattle, or sing to help prepare for the descent of the spirits.

At the time of the rising of the White Moon, stand beside the *oboo* and either drum or meditate. You will feel the flow downward from heaven as the spirits come down the *oboo* and congregate at the fire. If you feel so inclined, you may sing a

song or say a prayer to welcome their arrival. If you have sage or juniper, light it now and pass it around your body three times. If there is more than one person participating in the ritual, then each participant should do the same. The sacred smoke will open up the channels in your body and bring you up to the level of the spirits around you. The smoke is also very pleasing to the spirits, so if you are using sacred smoke, be sure to circle around the *oboo* and fire three times and wave the smoke to the spirits.

In the next part of the ritual you should either circle the *oboo* and fire by yourself, or if there are many people participating, you should join hands and go around the fire and *oboo* as a human circle. One or all should then say or sing the following verse. It is most effective if done with the accompaniment of a drum, since traditionally people will swing their arms forward and backward with the rhythm, hands joined.

Magtaal (praise song) for the White Moon (can be said in Mongolian or English)

<i>Haan Hormasta</i>	Haan Hormasta, ^{*5}
<i>huhe nomyn tenger manai!</i>	Spirits of the blue heavens!
<i>Zunaa naashin</i>	Summer will come
<i>Zudaa saashin!</i>	Hunger goes away!
<i>Uderuu naashin</i>	Day has come
<i>Uweluu saashin!</i>	Winter goes away!
<i>Noitooyo bazaazha</i>	The earth grows moist
<i>Nogo-go elbegeyer!</i>	Plants will abound!
<i>Ayangaa tarohan</i>	Storms will be mild
<i>Adaraa darohan.</i>	Rain will be gentle.
<i>Haan Hormasta</i>	Haan Hormasta,
<i>huhe nomyn tenger manai!</i>	Spirits of the blue heavens!

If many people are participating in this ritual and are forming a circle, the drumming should continue until the circle has gone around nine times. The speed of the drumming should gradually increase, so that by the last time the circle moves fairly fast (when I witnessed this ritual in Buryatia, at the end, people were moving very fast, the rhythm being about 100 beats per minute).

This circle dance is called the *yohor*; it dates back thousands of years and is depicted in prehistoric rock paintings in the Mongolian homeland. If you are doing this ritual by yourself, circle the fire and *oboo* sunwise nine times, gradually

increasing your drumming or rattling as you go. The *yohor* dance raises a spiral of spiritual energy to heaven, and you may find that you are in, or close to, a shamanic state of consciousness by the time you have completed the nine circles. For this reason, you may want to continue drumming and commune with the nature spirits who have congregated around the fire and *oboo* or go on a journey according to how the spirits lead you.

Traditionally after the ritual of greeting the spirits the feast of the White Moon begins. A portion of the food that is to be eaten is placed in the fire so that the spirits will eat with the people who celebrated the ritual. Also, milk, tea, or water should be tossed with a spoon to the four directions in order to honor the *tenger* (sky spirits) of the four directions. The White Moon Festival lasts until the moon becomes full. Traditionally the fire that is lit at the rising of the White Moon was not allowed to go out until the full moon, but that custom is rarely practiced today. After the ritual is completed, if more than one person is participating in the ritual, it is customary for all people to greet one another with the traditional Sagaalga greeting, "*Amar bain uu?*" ("Are you in peace?"). This greeting is accompanied with a special gesture called *zolgoh*, in which the two people who are greeting each other grasp each other on the forearm, just in front of the elbow. The younger person will grasp the forearms of his elder from below, symbolizing that the young will always support their elders. If the two people greeting each other are the same age, each will use his or her right hand to support the left forearm of the other person.

There is also one more thing, which is optional, that can be done. Each person participating in the ritual can make a drawing on a piece of paper that symbolizes the spirit of the fire. These pictures should be placed near the fire during the ritual so that the spirit of the home fire will enter them and each paper will become an *ongon* (spirit dwelling) for that spirit for the following year. This piece of paper is then hung near the stove of the house to bring good fortune. Because it bears witness to all that happens within the family, during Bituun a dab of butter is placed on it so that when the spirit goes up to

heaven it will not say anything about bad things that might have happened in the family during the year (Golomt Eej is said to be a bit of a gossip!). When the fire is lit for the White Moon ritual the following year, the old *ongon* of the fire spirit is burned and a new picture is drawn.

Chapter 8

Postscript: Applications for Shamanism in the Twenty-first Century

When you have fixed yourself,
Fix your community.
When you have fixed your community,
Fix the world.
When you have fixed the world,
Adjust your sash.
If you are afraid,
Don't do it.
If you do it,
Do not fear the outcome.

—Old Mongolian proverb



Since time is circular, the beginning of a new millennium and a new century is, in reality, only a concept of the human mind, yet this point in history does present opportunities for change in the way humankind takes care of the environment and in the behavior of the individual and society. Mongols and Buryats have a strong conviction that the vision of the world and the customs passed down from the ancestors bear an important message for the future. In fact, certain Mongolian prophecies convey the idea that the adoption of this message is most urgent.

This chapter will present some of these prophecies as well as some applications of Mongolian-Siberian principles for daily living. The rituals that are presented here are not as strictly traditional as the ones presented in previous chapters, but they still preserve the spirit of the daily practice of Mongolian shamanism. By contemplating these ideas and performing these simple practices you will have a daily reminder of the relationship between native peoples and the world, and you may find that, over time, you will discover new ideas and receive new visions for the future. This development is a natural result of the cultivation of windhorse within your being. Furthermore, you will find that all that you need and all things that you envision that keep the world in balance and bring *buyanhishig* into your life and the lives of others will manifest easily, almost magically.

The Role of the Individual in the World

If you contemplate the wise words presented at the beginning of this chapter you will realize that all great change starts with the individual. This notion is firmly based on the principle of personal responsibility, one of the three central ideas of Mongolian shamanism that was presented in the introduction. From the individual, the beneficial effects of cultivating windhorse and a life lived in balance will spread to the community, and from the community, to the world; but even then, one must retain a level of self-consciousness. Imagine a world where every community has individuals living in this manner, and you will imagine a world of peace and personal

power that, historically, we have not yet approached. Each individual has three aspects, which are reflected in the words that begin many shaman prayers: “*Tenger Etseg, Gazar Eej, Deedes Mini*,” which means, “Father Heaven, Mother Earth, the Ancestors.” In terms of the individual, Father Heaven is one’s spirit; Mother Earth is one’s physical being; and the Ancestors represent the wisdom available to all.

The spiritual aspect of an individual’s nature is associated with Father Heaven, from whom originates windhorse, spiritual power, and blessing. From Mother Earth we draw the nourishment for our physical being, and only from our connection with her can we continue to survive as human beings. We gain wisdom from the ancestors, from the memories of our *suns* and *ami* souls, as well as from the guidance and assistance of the ancestral *suld* souls who reside in natural places and in *ongons*, and who are the helper spirits of shamans. In addition to this more cosmic orientation, the individual must be related within the context of nature and society. There are three principles that guide this relation: (1) knowing oneself; (2) honoring the relationship of mother and child; (3) nature is the teacher.¹

When deeply grasped, these three principles are empowering. How many of us truly know ourselves? This knowing goes beyond knowing where we were born or what our names are. Knowing oneself is knowing one’s purpose in life, free of delusions and the demands of other people who may try to impose control upon us. When a person knows his or her life purpose, all other things become balanced and clear. One’s purpose in life is a touchstone so that when confronted with a problem, a demand, or a major decision, one can take one’s life purpose into consideration before making a decision. Knowing one’s purpose will also inspire vision and wisdom in how best to apply oneself for the betterment of society and the world.

The relationship of mother and child refers to not only the relationship between the individual and his or her birth mother but also the relationship between humankind and Mother Earth. Mothers provide us with life, and the earth is the origin of physical life as well. Practically no society in human history

has ever condoned disrespect for mothers by their children. Why is it that human society has so wantonly abused Mother Earth and forgotten this fundamental connection between our life and the nurturing earth on which we all stand? As stated in the Buryat prayer that begins chapter 7, we all draw milk from the breast of Mother Earth; why should we poison our own milk? This thought, if truly understood and taken to heart, will help to transform an individual's relationship with the environment.

Why is nature a teacher? This fact may not be readily apparent in the Western world where there has been an arbitrary separation between human society and nature. From the Mongolian perspective, however, there is no separation. Nature is a teacher because everything happens according to natural processes, whether in the natural environment or in human society. Politics, social movements, social interaction, religion, mathematics, science, technology, and all other human creations are all the products of natural processes. We do not "play God" because we have never been able truly to change any process of nature, only apply these processes in ways that are useful. Even this computer on which I write is powered by the sun, which has shone on the Sayan Mountains, melting the snow that flows into the Angara River and powers the dam that provides electricity for this Siberian city. The knowledge that I impart has been passed down by tradition, and transmission of knowledge is something that all sentient beings do. We are not so far away from our origins as we think. Only a few days living in the Mongolian steppe or in the Siberian forest will make that clear. If we do not learn from nature, whether at the level of subsistence, as are native peoples, or at the level of the most advanced scientific research, we will fail to understand our world and therefore waste our energies on mistakes, some of which may be quite costly.

What is the lesson that is too often ignored? It is that nature is in a state of balance already. The danger lies in the fact that technological society chooses to ignore the effects of its harnessing of natural processes on the rest of nature. The natural "law" of balance states that for everything that is done,

for every action, there is a reaction, and some of these reactions may present a danger to the future of humankind if more attention is not paid to them. In the social context we must also look at the natural processes affecting human society, both locally as well as globally. We must seriously address the problems of poverty and overpopulation; it is well known that overpopulation in animal communities ultimately leads to hardship, disorder, and death.

Visions for the Twenty-first Century

The Mongolian-Buryat intellectual Gongorjav Boshigt has described the three principles that guide one's relationship to nature and society as "eco-humanism." At this time he heads a movement in Mongolia, the Negdsen Hudelguun (United Movement), that advocates the application of traditional Mongolian principles to the reform of Mongolian society, rather than following the philosophy and economics of the colonialist powers that had formerly tried to impose their views from without. It is his vision, as well as the vision of many other Mongolian and Siberian leaders, that a new society based on these traditional principles can create a prototype for a new social order for the new millennium.²

As mentioned previously, many of the most dynamic leaders among Mongols and Siberians have come from traditionally shamanist regions. For example, in Inner Mongolia the leaders of the struggle for independence from China included several leaders from the traditionally shamanist Dagurs. In Mongolia, both in the revolution of 1921 and in the democratic movement of 1990, a remarkably large number of leaders came from the Buryats and Urianhai, both of whom have preserved shamanism better than most other Mongolian nationalities. While in former times they suffered the brunt of the harsh repression of Mongolian nationalism during Stalin's rule, in Buryatia shamans and leaders from strongly shamanist regions are in positions of great influence. The ideas of social responsibility as well as the guiding principles mentioned above are so much an integral part of Mongolian shamanist thought that it is no surprise that the regions of Mongolian lands where shamanism survived most strongly have produced

people inspired to political action and leadership. A person with a sense of life purpose will be impelled to improve not only his own life, but also the lives of those around him.³

The Buryat writer Erbaktonov has observed that Mongols have twice played key roles in world history. The first was when the Huns, the ancestors of the Mongols living in southern Siberia and Mongolia, migrated westward into Europe. The Huns' invasion dealt the final blow to Roman power and set the stage for the evolution of a new European society. Then again, in the thirteenth century, Chinggis Khan created a new world order, opening up trade and the exchange of ideas between Europe and Asia, a process that over time spurred European society into the Renaissance and the development of modern European society. In Asia the legacy of the Mongols was no less strong, for they united China, made several important reforms in Chinese society, and then later united much of India (in the Mogul Empire). In the opinion of Erbaktonov, however, the Mongols have a third opportunity in the new millennium to once again shape human history. In his own dramatic and prophetic words, Siberia will be the "pole of the new world culture." Why does he believe that the Mongols have such an important destiny? Mongolia/Siberia is one of the few places left in the world where traditional values and practices honoring earth and nature have survived in a relatively pure state up to the present time. For this reason Erbaktonov believes that Mongols and Siberians will lead a political movement to establish a new relationship with the biosphere.⁴

There are other Mongolian beliefs and prophecies that are in a more mythological and apocalyptic vein. For example, some Mongols believe that the spirit of Bukhe Beligte Tenger has indeed been reawakened following the shamanic ritual at his birthplace in 1995. According to a shaman's prophecy, the ritual would be followed by an earthquake, a signal of the revival of this *tenger*. This earthquake did happen as predicted soon after the ritual was over. Bukhe Beligte, according to Mongolian mythology, had been sent down to earth as the hero Geser after a feud between some of the *tenger* had resulted in disease and severe damage to the natural world. It is not a

stretch of the imagination to believe that Bukhe Beligte Tenger may need to be called again to restore our world to balance, even though the damage to our environment at this time is the result of the ignorance and selfishness of humans, rather than that of the *tenger*.

Another prophecy that many Mongols are now talking about concerns the return of Chinggis Khan. In some variants of the prophecy his spirit returned as a guide and protector for the Mongols in the White Moon of 1999, and some have suggested the creation of a great *ongon* to house his spirit. Others say that he will be born in the Sayan Mountains and that he will grow up to be a great leader. His role in human history, however, is not simply one of recreating an empire as it was in the Middle Ages. These prophecies say that he will bring a new vision and order to mankind that will be vital for human survival. Some variations of this prophecy also speak of invasion from outside of this world, but the central idea is reform of human society.

Since these visions of the future come from within Mongolian culture, they need to be viewed from a larger perspective. These are the ideas of a native people, like many native peoples throughout the world, that has struggled and succeeded in preserving the traditions passed down from its ancestors. In the larger picture, therefore, it conveys a message that is now coming from many places throughout the world where indigenous traditions have survived. Native peoples, who have lived in intimate contact and interaction with the natural world for countless generations, hold the key to the future. The society of the future will be constructed using the ideas that native peoples have in common, a wisdom that has evolved from thousands of years of intimate interaction with natural forces that affect us all.

Living with Windhorse: Four Daily Exercises

As with the other rituals offered in this book, these exercises require certain supplies as well as sacred settings in which to do them.

As each Mongolian household has a *hoimor*, or sacred place, so you should create a place for your sacred things and spiritual practice. You may already have some kind of altar or shrine in your home that would be appropriate. If not, a *hoimor* is very simple to create.

A *hoimor* is traditionally located on the north side of the *ger*, but it can face any direction when inside a house. A *hoimor* is usually in the living room or bedroom, facing the entrance to the room, but never in a bathroom (this would be considered disrespectful). The *hoimor* itself usually consists of a small table (like a coffee table or end table) with an incense burner, smudge pot, candle holders, and sacred objects such as *ongons*, crystals, pictures of gods and honored ancestors, and windhorse flags. Mongols often place small cups of tea, liquor, water, milk, or honey as well as small plates of cookies and uncooked grains as offerings to honor the spirits.

If you have a yard, you may also want to create an *oboo* or *barisaa* (see the peace-tree ritual) for honoring the spirits in a natural setting. Creating an *oboo* or *barisaa* raises a lot of windhorse, and you and people in your family may add offerings to them when asking the spirits for prosperity, healing, or other needs.

These exercises will require the use of herbs and incense. Herbs used on a daily basis are juniper, thyme, and sage. If available, you may also use fir needles and dried rhododendron. Since these will be burned in a smudge pot, I recommend that you use a mortar and pestle or blender to chop the herbs into a fine powder. You may mix them all together or add them as individual ingredients at the time you burn them. The types of incense that are most appropriate are sandalwood, wisteria, and lavender. If the others are not available, sandalwood is the best, since it is a plant of spiritual power and healing in Siberian shamanist tradition.

In Mongolia and Siberia the favored type of smudge pot is the *boipor*, a shallow brass bowl. Ashes are tamped down on the bottom of the bowl to form a thin lining. This insulation prevents the bowl from becoming excessively hot. Metal bowls hold heat better, and the herbs tend to stay lit longer. In

Mongolian tradition the herbs are poured into the bowl and then pinched together to form a tall thin ridge either in the form of a straight line or spiral. The herbs should be thoroughly dry and finely chopped so that they will stay lit without too much fussing. In lieu of using a smudge bowl with finely chopped herbs, you may also use sage and juniper smudge sticks or dried juniper fronds (but juniper tends to spit and crackle a lot and may be a fire hazard if used inside). In any case, be sure to take proper fire precautions with smudges.

Other supplies needed for these exercises are three bowls and either a feather, twig whisk, or wooden spoon for flicking liquids. Create a bottle of *arshaan* from mineral water by asking the spirits to imbue the water with their power.

These four exercises form a daily cycle and are done at sunset, at night before retiring, in the morning (sunrise), and at noon. Do not feel overly disturbed if events in your daily life prevent you from doing one or two during a twenty-four-hour cycle. The effects of the exercises will not be mitigated. Shamanism is not formalistic so much as it is a personal way of exploring the sacred within your own life. Disruptions and irregularities are part of daily life. If possible, however, try to at least remember the core ideas in the exercise you may have missed when you perform the next exercise in the cycle.

Sunset

This exercise should be done around sunset or a little bit before or after. Light some juniper and fir in the smudge pot, and wave the smoke over your chest and face. As you do this, let yourself relax and enter a state of meditation. Either mentally or aloud, thank Father Heaven and Mother Earth for the energy and nurturing that they give every day. Remember the warmth of the sun, which is like Tenger's eye looking upon our lives and a source of energy for all life. Remember the warmth of Mother Earth, like the feeling of green grass or warm sand under your bare feet.

Light four candles aligned to the four directions either on your altar or in the center of a sacred circle. These are *tulga*, pillars of support for a new world. They symbolize

community, world peace, harmony with nature, and harmony with the spirit world. Also think of the symbolism of the four directions, the male and female principles associated with west and east and how they need to be in balance. Think how the north and south represent the future and the past. Visualize a better future for the world. Meditate as long as you want; there is no time limit.

Night (Night Road)

This is a simple visualization to be done before going to bed at night. Go to your sacred place and light sandalwood and wisteria incense. Light three sticks together and ask the spirits a question that has been on your mind throughout the day. Note the position and shape of each stick and imagine that each of them represents a possible or desired outcome for your question. The three sticks should be lit at the same time from a single flame. Wave them gently nine times toward your *hoimor* or toward the north while requesting the spirits to give you an answer. Take note of how they are burning; the one that has burned down the most is the spirits' reply. Ask the spirits to show you visions, paths, and dreams of power during your sleep. You may also burn a smudge of thyme and rhododendron if you have them.

Now sit or stand in front of your sacred place and close your eyes. Breathe gently and deeply, allowing yourself to savor the smell of the sacred smoke. Imagine that you see a river flowing northward through the forest. The water gurgles noisily through rapids and small waterfalls, and the white water is lit with the silver light of the moon and stars. You can see the North Star shining above the course of the river. This is the river Dolbor, the night-road river. To one side you see a small bubbling brook flowing into the mighty river. This is the stream of your consciousness as it merges into and flows along with the consciousness of all other beings in the Dolbor. Listen to the music of the water and smell the damp fragrance of the forest. This is the taiga, the Siberian Amazon. You are there alone and in harmony with nature and the spirits. Suddenly a flock of geese appears, flying overhead. Bayan Ahaa, the master of the forest, has sent them to guide you on your dream

journey. Allow your consciousness to follow them down the river course. Are you swimming or flying with them? Either way you find yourself drawn to the luminous Pole Star, and the entrance to other worlds.

Allow yourself to travel on this journey for as long as you feel comfortable. This will set you in a state of mind for powerful dreaming. Once you start doing this you may want to keep a notebook by your bed so that you can write down your dreams when you wake up. The visualization part of this exercise may also be done as a way to bring yourself to sleep to night.

Sunrise (Morning)

This exercise can be done at sunrise or in the morning anytime after sunrise. The exercise is for honoring the spirits and bringing protection, and it will involve the throwing of liquids, tea, milk, and water. If tea and milk are not available, the exercise may be done with just water. If you have a sacred place outside, you may walk in a circle around it or walk around your house. If you cannot go outside, the liquids may be thrown out an open window, as Mongols living in apartment buildings do. Fill the three bowls you will be using for this exercise with tea, milk, and water. They do not have to be full to the brim, but full enough in order to complete the sprinkling as described below.

The three ceremonial liquids are imbued with special symbolism:

tea	heaven	spirit
milk	earth	body
water	nature spirits	wisdom

To begin, burn either juniper powder in the smudge bowl or light a dried juniper frond or juniper smudge stick. First wave the smoke onto your crown chakra, third eye, and then over your chest. Pass the bowl around yourself three times, then wave a little under your armpits and once more over the face. Next take the *arshaan*, pour a little in your hand, sip it, then put the rest of it on the top of your head. This is *ariulga*, a

ritual that cleanses the spiritual body, brings protection, and empowers you for the day.

Afterward, pick up the bowl of tea and walk in a circle (if outside) or otherwise go to an open window and throw the tea with a spoon or flick it with a feather. Do it three times to the south, three times to the west, three times to the north, and three times to the east. As you do this, remember that you are doing this to honor Father Heaven, Mother Earth, and the ancestors, represented by the three libations. Also think of the spirits of the skies and earth that are located at the four directions. Do the same for the milk and the water. Meditate on the symbolism of the three liquids. Also, think of yourself as honoring the *ongon* spirits, nature spirits, water spirits, the spirits of all living things, and all other entities that you might honor. This part of the exercise should be done in a meditative state of mind, either silently, or with invocations or poetry; it is up to you. The important thing is not to let yourself be distracted from the sacred action.

If you want, you may drink the remaining liquids, which the spirits have energized during your exercise, and perhaps share them with others whom you care about or who need them. If you do not want to drink them, pour half of the liquid on the earth and throw half to the heavens, but do not simply throw the liquids away because this will dishonor the sacred thing you have just done.

Noon (Udeii Sag)

This exercise completes the daily cycle and should be done when the sun is high in the sky. The sun represents the eye of Father Heaven and the energy that enters our beings from above at all times. This exercise is simple, and you do not need to use sacred smoke unless you want to. The best place to do this exercise is outside, either by a *barisaa* or at any tree that you feel would work for you. If you are not able to go outside to a tree, visualize one in your mind. If the day is cloudy, it does not matter, since the presence of daylight itself is a reminder of the light from Father Heaven.

Go up to (or visualize that you go up to) a tree. Look at its trunk, the shape of its branches and crown. Can you see the spirit of the tree? Meditate on how you are like that tree and how it draws energy and nourishment from heaven and earth. Go up to its trunk and lean your back against it and feel the flow of energy within the living tree. Can you sense how it mirrors the flow of energy within your own body?

Now stand once more in front of it and imagine that it is the *turge* tree, the World Tree, and how its branches can lead you to the upper world or open up a passage to the lower world. If you are doing this exercise with others, join hands to encircle the tree. Meditate on how the *turge* is the center of all things, where all realities and beings meet. Sense the connection between yourself and all living things and spirits. Feel your connection with all times in the past and with the ancestors. Then gaze upward to the crown of the tree and imagine how, just like the growing, living tree, we all spring upward toward the future. We are cocreators of the future. What are we doing to make the Tree of All Existence grow healthily and mightily for the future? Remember that at this time you are not only in touch with the ancestors of the past but also with all the ancestors yet to come. Let them inspire you with the visions that they will impart as you become aware of how they existed in their time. Meditate on this awareness as long as you want.



A Special Ritual: Erecting a Prayer Tree for World Peace

The *barisaa*, or prayer tree, is an important site of worship in Siberian-Mongolian shamanism. The creation of such a tree by means of this ritual brings peace and reduces violence in whatever place it is performed. This ritual needs to be done in as many places as possible, especially in places where deaths from war or violence have occurred. The ritual also calls on the nature spirits to bring inspiration, calm peoples' hearts, and create thoughts of peace and love.

Human beings possess three souls, the *suld*, *suns*, and *ami*. The *suld* embodies the unique personality of the present life and becomes a nature spirit after death. The *suld* of a person

who has died can be beneficial or harmful, depending on the circumstances of death. The *suld* souls of those who have been killed or died very young are often hostile and cause disease, mental confusion, despair, and thoughts of violence. These effects are brought about because of the desire for vengeance on the part of these spirits against those who are able to enjoy long and successful lives with prosperity, happiness, and children. These spirits are ignorant of the fact that they can still make a constructive contribution to human society, even as spirits.

The twentieth century has been one of the bloodiest and most violent in human history. Even now, as wars rage throughout the world and society becomes more chaotic, a certain despair and frustration has entered peoples' hearts. One reason why this emotional distress continues is that so many people from all parts of the world have died violently and prematurely, and their *suld* souls are ranging about the places where they had been during their lives, especially battlefields, sites of massacres, and violent inner-city areas. Their spirits implant the desire for revenge, violent thoughts, mental confusion, despair, and illness in those places, thereby causing the violence and misery to continue. This ritual cleanses these spirits of evil and violent thoughts and turns them toward bringing good to the places where they are. It needs to be performed in as many places as possible in order to calm the spiritual chaos that this evil century has created.

The most important thing needed for this ritual is a young tree; the species of tree is not important, but it should be healthy and not in any immediate danger of being cut down. If at a later time the tree must be cut, a young tree should be planted nearby and the ribbons and other shamanic decorations transferred to the new tree.

Things Needed for Ritual:

- White cloth ribbons, about one foot long (at least ten, or two for each participant, whichever is more)
- Sage
- Juniper (dried fronds or sticks)

- Springwater
- Salt
- Sand
- Rice
- Milk
- Tea
- Vodka (optional)
- Incense with burner
- Bread
- Cookies
- Money (coins are fine)
- Small table
- Small spoon or bundle of small twigs, about six inches long

A small table should be set next to the tree. An incense burner should be set on the table and incense should be kept lit constantly during the ceremony. The ribbons should be placed in a neat pile. The salt, sand, rice, bread, and cookies should be on plates. The springwater, milk, tea, and vodka should be in bowls.

To begin, one of the participants should smudge the tree with sage. The participants should then form a circle around the tree, each one taking at least two of the ribbons and tying them to the branches of the tree. While tying the ribbons each person should meditate on bringing peace to the world, to the community, and to his or her personal life. Then the shaman who will preside in the ritual should take the juniper, light it, and walk around the tree three times, fanning the smoke outward to the spirits. Here is a sample prayer for this part of the ceremony:

Nature spirits of this place

Suld souls of those who have departed

Be cleansed of your anger

Be cleansed of vengeful thoughts

Be filled with light

Be filled with love and peace

(The participants may drum during this part of the ceremony if they want.)

The shaman should then take the springwater, and after calling on his or her spirits for power, breathe into the water three times. The shaman should then take the spoon or twig whisk and circle the tree three times, throwing the water outward to the spirits. After the third circling, the remaining water should be put back on the table. The shaman should then circle the tree three times throwing salt to the spirits in the same manner, then circle three times throwing the sand, and then three more times throwing the rice. The salt, sand, and rice should be depleted by the third time around. What is thus accomplished is the *ariulga*, the cleansing, of the nature spirits in the community where this ritual is performed.

The shaman should then offer a second prayer, perhaps something like this:

Nature spirits of this place

Suld souls of those who have departed

Having forgiven what has happened in the past

Be aware that you can do good for all living things

You can bring goodness to all human beings

Inspire people with vision for the future

Bring calm and confidence to their minds

Fill their hearts with thoughts of peace and love

Hurai! Hurai! Hurai!

Hurai! Hurai! Hurai!

Hurai! Hurai! Hurai!

(The word *hurai* should be accompanied by the clockwise movement of the right arm in front of the body.)

The shaman should then drum (the others may drum too), and all participants in the ritual should slowly circle the tree

three times. The shaman then takes the milk and circles the tree once, throwing a little milk to the spirits with the spoon or twig whisk, then circles once more throwing a little tea, and then once more throwing a little vodka. Then each of the participants should take a piece of bread or a cookie, crumble it into pieces, and scatter the pieces at the base of the tree. The shaman will then pour half of the remaining milk on the ground by the base of the tree and then throw half to the sky. The same should be done with the remaining tea and vodka. Then each of the participants should leave a few coins at the base of the tree. These are gifts to the nature spirits and the spirit of the tree. Other gifts may include tobacco or milk products such as dabs of butter or crumbles of cheese. Milk products also honor Mother Earth.

Once the ceremony is concluded, each of the participants should take a sip from the springwater. It has become *arshaan*, energized water, and it has power to cleanse the spirit. Any remaining water may be drunk by the shaman or may be poured next to the tree.

The tree has now become a *barisaa*, a shamanist shrine to the nature spirits. It should be regularly honored with small gifts of food and liquid. People may also tie additional ribbons to the branches to ask the spirits for assistance, protection, or the granting of wishes, or they can leave money. Of course, animals and other people may later take the food and money, but the act of giving creates *buyanhishig* and increases a person's windhorse. The ritual for the calming of the spirits will have a permanent effect and will benefit all people in the community where it is performed, not just the participants.

May the new century be one of peace!

Glossary of Mongolian and Siberian Terms

Note on pronunciation: All Mongolian words accent the first syllable. As many Mongolian words are pronounced quite differently from how they appear, I have provided pronunciation guides for words from the Mongolian languages with which I am most familiar, such as Buryat and Yakut. For words in languages with which I am less familiar, such as Nenets, Nanai, and Tungus, I have only provided a guide when absolutely sure of a word's pronunciation.

ab: Magical powers.

abaahy, abaasy (a-ba-hee): (Yakut) Evil spirits found in all three worlds, similar to *chotgor*. They usually need to be placated with an animal sacrifice.¹

abaral (ah-ba-rul): Fortune-telling, divination.

abtai or **abuusha** (ab-tai or ah-boo-sha): Title for shamans meaning “magical.”

ada (aad): One-eyed dwarf spirit with a wild temperament. May cause disease.

Adagalog (Ah-da-gahl-ik): Holy mountain in Buryatia.

Adagata agaljan (ah-da-gah-ta ah-gul-jahn): Mental illness when shamanesses are called by the spirits.

Adaguusha Ongon (ah-da-goosh): Patron spirit of humor. *Ongons* of this spirit are made by people using humor in their work.

agnuuriin ongon (ahg-noor-iin on-gon): An *ongon* made to help in hunting.

Ahanad (ah-han-ahd): Elder, leading shaman in a ritual.

aiha (eye-ha): Shamanist sacred grove.

ajarai (aj-a-ray): Evil or terrible, dangerous powers. Also the name of an eastern *tenger*.

Ajarai Buhe (aj-a-ray Bu-heh): Master spirit of the Lena River, his name means “all terrible.”

Ala Buurai Toion (ahla boh-rai toy-on): (Yakut) See Erleg Khan.²

alba hiikh (ahl-bah hiikh): Ritual for protecting boys and men.

Alma Mergen (ahl-mah mer-gun): Daughter of Uha Loson, she is the prototypical shamaness and warrior woman and the wife of Bukhe Beligte.

Altan Hadaas (ahl-tun ha-dahss): The North Star, support of the sky and location of entrance to upper world.

altan umai, mungen bahana (ahl-tun oh-my, moon-gen bah-ha-nah): A type of shrine made at caves. The cave represents the womb, and a pole is erected by its entrance representing the phallus (male principle). Site of rituals for fertility. Name literally means “golden womb, silver pole.”

Altatan (al-ta-ten): Female *ongon* spirit that protects young children and animals.

Ama Sagaan Noyon (ahm sagahn no-yon): The spirit of the source of the sacred Angara River.

ami, amin (em, em-in): The body soul, one of a human being's two reincarnating souls, it carries ancestral memories since it follows family lineages. It resides in the upper world between lives in the form of a bird and is sent to the body by Umai Burhan at childbirth. It is early lost by children and its loss is a frequent cause of illness. The *ami* vibrates up and down the axis of the soul sphere; the other two souls are the *suld* and *suns*.

amidai (ah-mi-die): Feathered headdress of shaman, may use eagle or raven feathers.

amiluulah (ah-mi-low-lakh): Ritual to empower equipment used by the shaman such as the drum, costume, headdress, and so on.

amin tahalha (ah-min tah-hal-ha): Cutting off of the *ami* soul; soul loss.

anahai (ahn-a-hai): Dwarf spirit dangerous to children up to the age of seven.

Anda Bars (ahn-da barss): Patron spirit of hunters in western Buryatia, usually housed in an *ongon*. This was also the name of a legendary Evenk shaman.

Angara Muren (Ahn-ga-rah Moo-ren): Sacred river of Buryat shamanism, originating in Lake Baikal.

araatan (ahr-ah-tun): “Fanged one,” *ongon* of the spirit of a predatory animal.

ara ner: Nickname or pseudonym used by shamans for their work; also, the taboo name of a totem or spirit.

aranga (ah-ran-gah): Traditional burial platform for shamans. Equipment is usually placed with the body of the shaman.

Ara Tenger (arah tenger): The foreign *tenger*.

ard: See *hoit*.

arga (arag): The male energy associated with physical force.

ariulga (ah-ree-ohl-gah): Purification ritual to cleanse from evil with the help of fire. Either thyme, juniper, or fir needles are placed in the fire to produce sacred smoke.

ariun (ah-ree-ohn): Sacred, clean, pure.

arsa, arts (ahr-sah): See juniper.

arshaan (ahr-shahn): Mineral water; also any liquid that has been cleansed and empowered by shaman spirits.

Asarangi Tenger (as-rahng-gi): Powerful eastern *tenger*, helper of black shamans; there are also thirteen eastern *tenger* also known as the *Asrangi Tenger*.

ataatai buu (ah-tah-tai boo): Malevolent shaman.

Atai Ulaan Tenger (ataa oh-lahn): Chief *tenger* of the eastern direction.

Avgaldai (av-gal-die): Bear spirit; its *ongon* is a copper mask with animal hair used to make eyebrows, moustache, and beard. This mask is used during the shamanic initiation and *ominan* ritual. Otherwise Avgaldai is a protector spirit of the house.³

ayagtai buu (ah-yag-tai boo): Emotional, artistic shaman.

Ayysyt (eye-seet): (Yakut) See Umai.⁵

ayyy (eye): (Yakut) Spirits of the eastern direction; helper spirits.⁴

Ayyy Toion (eye toy-on): (Yakut) Chief spirit of the *ayyy*.⁶

baabai (bah-bai): Meaning “father,” it is a term of respect for male spirits.

baabain mungen bahana (bah-bain moon-gen bah-ha-nah): A pole representing the male organ in fertility rituals.

baabgain naadam (baab-gain nah-dym): A shamanic dance that imitates the movements and personality of the bear.

baabgain yoholol (baab-gain yoh-hoh-lol): Ceremony performed by hunters after killing a bear.

bariach (bar-ee-atch or bare-ee-asha): A shamanlike practitioner who adjusts bones and may also do some healing using powers granted by the spirits. Some have their own *udha* but they are not recognized as being true shamans.

barisaa (bare-i sah): A prayer tree, a tree with power for manifesting things desired with true intent.

barusi: (Nganasan) Humanlike spirits harmful to people.⁷

baruun (bah-rohn): The western direction.

Bayan Ahaa (bai-an a-haa): Master spirit of the forest and patron of hunting and fishing. His image was carved on the side of a tree and revered like an *ongon* to bring good hunting and fishing luck. *Ongons* of Bayan Ahaa are also made and placed in the holy place of the home. Another type of *ongon* is made from a piece of wood or stick with a human face carved on one end that is then stuck in the ground by the door. Also known as Bayan Hangai.

Bayanay (bai-an ai): (Yakut) See Bayan Ahaa.⁸

bilig (bilik): Female energy; principle of wisdom and cunning.

bokholdoi (bo-hol-doy): Spirit of a dead person that has not gone to the lower world; may appear in physical form.

bombor (boom-boor): See *hengereg*.

bong (bong): A type of undead being, a corpse possessed by a foreign spirit.

Buh Noyon Baabai (bookh noy-ohn baa-bai): Mythical bull ancestor of the Buryats.

Bukhe Beligte (boo-khe belig-teh): One of the western *tenger*, he incarnated on earth thousands of years ago to defeat monsters and diseases that threatened mankind. He was a prototype of the warrior shaman.

buni: (Nanai) Lower world, land of the dead.²

burhan (bore-hun): Strong nature spirit, sometimes an upper-world spirit; very strong and cannot be controlled by a shaman, only placated. Generally good, but sometimes causes illness or soul loss.

busyu (boos-you): (Nanai) Evil spirit that was soul of criminal or suicide.¹⁰

but (bote): Strips of cloth tied to trees at places of spiritual power. The ribbon represents a prayer.

buu (boo): Male shaman.

buumal (bow-mul): Sacred object usually believed to have originated in the upper world; spontaneously manifested objects thought to be a gift from the spirits.

buyan (boy-un): Positive energy caused by good deeds or by doing *dallaga*. It builds up windhorse.

buyanhishig (boy-un-hish-ik): Same as *buyan*.

chalbek (chal-bik): (Khakass) A prayer stick made of a birch twig adorned with red and blue cloth squares.¹¹

Chiuk (chyuk): Spirit of the gray eagle.¹²

chotgor (chut-ger): Spirits that cause disease. Some are truly malevolent spirits, some are simply spirits that belong in the lower world but have gotten lost. Most *chotgor* were formerly *suns* souls of humans.

chuki: (Evenk, Lamut, Nanai) Burial platform for bears, similar to burial platform for shamans.¹³

Daiyk: (Altai) Fire spirit similar to Golomt Eej, but is male. Called the “golden edged one.” He is said to be the lord of the middle world.¹⁴

dalbuur (dahl-bohr): Feather or horsehair fan used in healing rituals.¹⁵

dali (dah-lee): Wild rhododendron, a sacred smoke in Buryat shamanism; also an herb for treating colds.

dallaga (dahl-a-ga): Calling for *buyan*, done by waving the right hand sunwise and saying “*hurai, hurai, hurai!*”

Dawai: (Tungus) *Ongon* of a Buryat shamaness, protects cattle, occasionally invoked in Buryat oaths.¹⁶

Dayan Derkhe (dai-ahn deerkh): Patron of shamans and of childbirth, his shrine is in a cave in Huvsgul Aimag in Mongolia.

deedes mini (day-dus min): Collective term for the spirits of the ancestors used in invocations.

dolbor (dahl-ber): Mongolian name for the World River; also the name of the lower-world soul-retrieval journey, which follows this river’s course.

Doloon Obgon (do-lawn ub-gun): The Big Dipper, literally, the “Seven Old Men.” The Little Dipper is called Baga (bak) Doloon Obgen, the “little Seven Old Men.”

Dumne: (Tungus) See Tatai Tenger.¹⁷

durvun zug (door-ven zook): The four directions.

duwalang: (Dagur) (doo-wah-lang) A set of twelve different types of trees important to the Dagur Mongol shaman.¹⁸

dyamada: (Nganasan) Helper spirits of the shaman.¹⁹

ela guren: (Evenk) See *yala guren*.

emeget: (Yakut) Same as *udha*; its *ongon* is attached to the Yakut shaman costume.²⁰

engedekit: (Evenk) See *dolbor*.

Eren Khan: (Altai) See Erleg Khan.

Erleg Khan (air-lek hahn): Master spirit of the lower world, judge of *suns* souls, determiner of future incarnations. He is also the elder brother of Ulgen and chief spirit of the eastern *tenger*. He represents the destructive aspect of the universe.

Erlik (air-lik): See Erleg Khan.

Etseg Malaan Tenger (etseg Ma-lahn): “Bald lord *tenger*”; a western *tenger* who is a protector of livestock and forest animals. He is the same deity as Ulgen in Altaian tradition. He is the husband of Manzan Gurme Toodei and grandfather of Bukhe Beligte.

ezen: Master spirit of a place in nature, such as a rock, plant, body of water, or mountain. Also a master spirit of a shamanistically powerful object.

ezetei (e-zeh-tay): Having a master spirit (*ezen*).

Fadzya Mama (fahd-zyah mama): (Nanai) See Golomt Eej.²¹

fania: (Nanai) Figure of the deceased buried with the body; temporary *ongon* for *suns* until transition to lower world.²²

fir: Sacred tree in Mongolian and Siberian shamanism, its needles are burned in purification rituals.

gal golomt (gahl gahl-umt): Also called *golomt*, the place of the fire, symbolic of world center.

ganga: See *thyme*.

gavia (gah-vee-yah): Spiritual merit for good deeds and a spiritual life, similar to *buyan*; also means “fame.”

ger (gir): The traditional dwelling of the Mongols, Buryats, Tuvans, Altai, and some other Siberian peoples. Usually made of felt with a wood frame or of logs stacked in an octagonal pattern (similar to the Navajo hogan).

Geser (gess-er): See Bukhe Beligte.

Golomt Eej (gol-omt edge): Spirit of fire, revered as a female spirit by most Siberian and Mongol groups. Her *ongon* was a drawing on a sheet of paper that was burned and replaced at the beginning of the lunar new year. Some Mongols give her a place to sit by the hearth by hanging an iron ring from the fire grate.²³

Golomto (gol-om-ta): See Golomt Eej.

gurvan maral (gohr-vun mar-ul): The belt of Orion, literally, the “three deer.”

hadag (hahd-uk): Ceremonial silk scarf, usually sky blue, used to decorate or wrap sacred objects.

Han Hormasta (hahn hohr-must): One of the chief spirits of the western *tenger*, the son of Etseg Malaan Tenger and father of Bukhe Beligte Tenger.

has temdeg (haas tem-dig): Swastika-like design symbolizing the four directions, the four elements, and the movement of the Big Dipper in the night sky.

hengereg (hen-ge-reg): Shaman drum, one sided, one to two feet in diameter.

hes hengereg (hes hen-ge-reg): Shaman’s tambourine.

hiimori (hee-mur): See *windhorse*.

hoimor (hoy-mor): The sacred place in a Mongolian dwelling, usually on the north side.

hoit (hoyt): The northern direction.

hoomei (hoo-mee): Throat singing; it produces two tones at the same time, a low tone and a high whistling tone. It was traditionally used for shaman song but is now sung by nonshamans as well in Mongolia, Buryatia, Tuva, and Altai.

hos modon (haws moh-don): The birch used for making all kinds of wooden implements for shamanic ritual, *serge* poles, sites for worshiping Bayan Ahaa and other nature spirits, and provider of wrapping for sacred objects. Some Siberian tribes also make ritual scrolls from the bark.

huch (hooch): Personal physical and spiritual strength.

Huherdei Mergen (hoo-her-day mer-gun): *Tenger* of lightning; it is customary to plant a fig tree on a spot struck by lightning in order to return the gift to heaven.

hun (hoon): A human being.

hurai (hoo-ray): Mongolian magic word, it is said to call *buyan* from the spirits. It is usually said three times (or in multiples of three) accompanied by the sunwise movement of the right arm or both arms.

ichchi: (Yakut) See *ezen*.²⁴

id (id): Magical powers.

ilbe (ilb): See *id*.

Il'in: (Nenets) The Arctic Ocean, entrance to the lower world.²⁵

Irmu Khan: See Erleg Khan; also a Dagur Mongol name for the lower world.

Izyk Khan (iz-ik hahn): (Khakass) Protector spirit of herds.²⁶

Japnaja: (Tungus) The “eater,” a lower-world spirit.²⁷

jodoo: See *fir*.

joroo (jah-rah): The custom of sharing foods used in ritual once the ceremony is over.

juniper (arsa): Sacred plant in Mongolian and Siberian shamanism, its smoke cleanses and sanctifies and is a mild hallucinogen. Its smoke is said to raise windhorse and is used in all ritual work, as it is pleasing to the spirits.

Keiden: (Dagur) See Tatai Tenger.

kelen, keleeni (ke-len): (Yakut) Helper spirits of shamans; tricksters by nature and will often express outrageous and funny behavior through the shaman during his journey.²⁸

khan (haan): Sky spirit; see *tenger*; (Nenets) Sacrifice of animal.²⁹

khanggor: (Nenets) Bloodless sacrifice, food, money, etc.³⁰

kuoyka: (Nganasan) See *ongon*; also a name for a holy place in nature.³¹

kut (coot): Spirits causing disease and mental confusion, they are less than a meter tall and are usually the souls of people who died tragically or by suicide. They tend to attack women and are afraid of light.

Kyzy: (Selkup) Spirit that causes disease by sending spirits in the form of worms and insects to infect the blood.³²

Loz: (Selkup) Nature spirit.³³

lus (loose): Nature spirits of the waters, also spelled *los*.

mangadhai (man-gad-hai): Monster, usually with multiple heads.

Mongoldai Nagts (mon-gol-die nag-a-sa): Literally, “Mongolian uncle”; he is protector of the entrance to the lower world.³⁴

mukhomor (moo-kho-mer): Sacred mushroom in Siberian shamanism, a powerful hallucinogen. Also known as fly agaric, it is consumed after being dried. Extremely poisonous if not prepared properly.

mushin (moo-shin): The Pleiades. The seven stars are honored in many ceremonies, most importantly the White Moon ceremony. They are the meeting place of the upper-world spirits.

naija (nye-zha): Shaman who agrees to become a spiritual protector for a young child.

Naran Dulaan Tenger (nahr-un doh-lahn): The Buryat sun god. His daughter, Naran Goohon, came to earth to live as a human and give birth to the human incarnation of Bukhe Beligte

Tenger.

Nga: (Nenets) Evil son of Num.³⁵

nguo: (Nganasan) Spirits of skies, fire, animals, nature, disease.³⁶

nugeltei (nuu-gel-tay): Taboo.

Num: (Nenets) See Tenger Etseg.³⁷

Numa Torum: (Mansi) See Tenger Etseg.³⁸

odigan, odigon: See *udagan*.

ojan (oh-jan): Nature spirit that has never incarnated; generally troublesome and causes disease or harasses shamans while they work. They are placated by *tsatsah*.³⁹

olorgi: (Tungus) See *suns*.⁴⁰

Ome Barkhan (oh-may bar-hahn): See Umai.⁴¹

onggor (on-gor): See *udha*.

ongon (on-gun): Dwelling for helper spirit of a shaman and protector spirits of a household and flocks. They are made of wood, leather, antler, bone, cloth, paper, and feathers and can be abstract, pictorial, or doll-like. This term is also used for the spirit itself. A lay person can make an *ongon* but the shaman empowers it.

ongon mod (on-gun mod): Also called *ongon modon* (on-gun mod-un); a tree that is the dwelling place of a powerful spirit.

orgoi: Antlered shaman headdress; the antlers may be natural or metal.

oyun: (Yakut, Dulgaan) Male shaman.⁴²

penzer: (Nenets) Shaman drum; see *hengereg*.⁴³

Sagaalgan (sa-gahl-gun): Also known as Tsagaan Sar (sagahn sar); the celebration of the first moon of the lunar new year, the beginning of spring.

sage (*aya, sharilj*): Sacred plant in Mongolian and Siberian shamanism, its smoke purifies and is used for smudging. Its smoke is also pleasing to the spirits.

sahius (sa-hee-os): Power bag of shaman, similar to Native American medicine bag; also nature spirit or the helper spirit of the shaman. In some cases it also refers to the chief shaman spirit, the *udha*.

sayka (syeh-kah): (Nanai) most evil form of *busyu*.⁴⁴

Segeen Sebdeg Tenger (she-gayn seb-dek): Tenger of ice and snow.

serge (sehr-ge): Carved wooden pole or ceremonial tree used in Buryat shaman ceremonies.

Sesegen Nogoön (se-se-gen noh-gone): Goddess of spring, daughter of Segeen Sebdeg Tenger.

seterleh (se-ter-leh): Dedication of a live animal as an *ongon* for a certain purpose. The animal is not killed, but rather allowed to live a normal life span. The spirits require a healthy animal and often require a certain color as well.

seven (seven): (Nanai) Spirit, good or bad; also Evenk word for shaman.⁴⁵

shagai (shah-gai): Cubical sheep bones used for fortune-telling.

Shalyg: (Altai) Patron of hunting.⁴⁶

sharilj: See *sage*.

shid (shid): See *id*.

shiree (shih-ray): Altar; ceremonial table in shamanic rituals.

solongo (saw-long-oh): Rainbow, passageway for upper-world travel. Also called “bow of Han Hormasta.”

soolong (saw-long): Shamanic vision dream (Dagur dialect).⁴⁷

suld (soold): A human being's nonreincarnating soul; it settles in nature after a certain period following death. It becomes one of the helpful ancestor spirits and can be settled in an *ongon*.

suns (soonss): One of the reincarnating souls of humans, it carries memories of past lives. It resides in the lower world between lives.

tadebtsyu: (Nenets) Messenger spirits between shaman and Father Heaven.⁴⁸

tahilga (teh-hil-eg): General term for shamanic rituals.

taiga (tai-gah): The immense virgin forest of Siberia, the largest forest in the world.

tailagan (tile-gun): Sacrifice made as an offering of thanks to the spirits for past good things and to ensure continued fortune.

tarni (tar-ni): Magical spell.

Tatai Tenger (tah-tie ten-gur): Tenger of lightning and storms; Buryats and Mongols invoke him at times of sudden injury.⁴⁹

tegsh (tegsh): The principle of living in balance.

tenger (ten-gur): Spirits of the heavens; very powerful and cannot be mastered by a shaman, only requested for assistance.

Tenger (ten-gur): Tenger Etseg, Father Heaven.

Tenger Etseg (ten-gur et-seg): Father Heaven, the chief deity of Siberian and Mongolian shamanism. He is the creator, source of all other spirits, and provider of energy to living things through the crown of the head.

Tenger Niannian (ten-gur nyan-nyan): See *Umai*.

Tengeriin Oyodol (ten-ger-iyn oy-oh-dl): The Milky Way, literally "seam of Heaven." Many of the upper-world spirits are said to have originated from it.

tengeriin us (ten-ger-iyn oos): Objects imbued with supernatural power such as ancient artifacts, lightning-struck objects, or meteorites.⁵⁰

Tengeriin Zuidel (ten-ger-iyn zwee-dl): See *Tengeriin Oyodol*.

thyme: Sacred plant in Mongolian and Siberian shamanism, its smoke purifies and is used for smudging. Its smoke is also pleasing to the spirits.

toli (toyl): Shaman mirror, round, usually made of brass, bronze, silver, or ground stone.

toono (taw-no): The smokehole, gateway to the upper world.

tor (tour): (Khakass) See *ongon*.⁵¹

toroo (tah-roh): The World Tree, usually visualized as a birch or willow; also called *turgu*.

Tsagaan Sar: See *Sagaalga*.

tsats: A temporary *ongon* into which an evil spirit is banished during a healing. It is destroyed afterwards.

tsatsah (tsot-sakh): Throwing ceremonial liquids, usually water, milk, tea, or liquor, during ritual. *Tsatsah* is also done when a container of liquor is opened and in the morning when liquids are thrown to heaven and the four directions. Usually done with a *tsatsal* or with the ring finger of the right hand.

tsatsal (tsot-sul): Carved wooden spoon used for tossing liquids during shaman ceremonies.

tsog (tsok): Psychic power of the shaman; visualized as fire or lightning and can be seen in the eyes.

Tsolmon (sol-mon or sol-bon): The planet Venus.

Tur Khan (toor-hahn): *Ongon* of fertile soil, the spirit is black-faced and rides a black horse. His *ongon* is a picture of a black horse.⁵²

udagan (oh-duh-gun): Female shaman.

udha (ohd-ha): Initiatory spirit of the shaman. This spirit usually brings on illness when it manifests in early adulthood. It usually is the *suld* of a past shaman that attaches itself to

shamanic lineages.

Uha Loson (oh-ha low-sun): Chief of the water spirits (*lus*).

Ulaan Tergel (oh-lahn ter-gel or oh-lahn ter-ged): The ancient festival of the summer solstice; literally means “Red Round,” or as Naran Butsah Odor, “Day of the Sun’s Turning Back.”

Ulgen (ool-gehn): (Altai) Chief of the spirits of the upper world and of the western *tenger*; younger brother of Erleg Khan. He sent mankind fire and the first shaman. He sometimes appears on earth as a large male animal. In Buryat his name means “high heaven.”

uliger (ul-ger): Myths or tales explaining the natural world and early history.

Uluu Toion (Ooloo Toy-on): (Yakut) See Ulgen.⁵³

Umai Burhan (oh-my borehun): Goddess of fertility, her name literally means “womb.” A special *ongon* for male children is made to her consisting of an arrow decorated with beads and bone pendants, and more decorations are added during events in the child’s life. Her *ongon* is usually a picture of her that is placed in a bag with other power objects and the umbilical cords of children. She tends the *ami* souls at the World Tree between incarnations and she is present for three days after the birth of a child.⁵⁴

umnu (uuh-mun): The southern direction.

unen fayenga: (Evenk) See *suld*.⁵⁵

urid (oh-rid): See *umnu*.

Usan Khan (oh-sun hahn): Master spirit of the waters.

uur (uur): (Yakut) Evil spirit residing in middle world, usually *suld* of evil shamans or people who died violently or prematurely.⁵⁶

uurts (oarts): Siberian style tepee.

windhorse (*hiimori*): Personal psychic energy, it is increased by good deeds (*buyan*) and decreased by bad deeds and negative thoughts.

yalaa guren (ya-lah goo-ren): A section of the lower world where souls are destroyed. Only the souls of the most evil people are not allowed to reincarnate.

Ya-nebya: (Nenets) Mother Earth.⁵⁷

yohor (yoh-hohr): Buryat Mongolian shamanist circle dance; it may be used to assist the shaman during his journey. Almost all Siberian tribes dance the *yohor*; *yohor* is the Mongolian name.

yostoi (yohs-toy or yo-ho-toy): Living in accordance with customs and traditions.

zadai (zah-dai): Magical rainmaking and storm-stopping stone.

Zarzargach (zar-zar-goch): Master of sea and fish, whose name means “judge.” His *ongon* is humanlike but has no legs.⁵⁸

zasal (zah-sul or zah-hul): Shamanic ritual; literally means “repair.”

zayaa (za-yaah): Fate, fortune, karma.

zayaan (zai-yaan): Upper-world spirits that determine fortune and assist the shaman.

zolig (zo-lik): Scapegoat, an animal that absorbs a disease spirit from an individual. More commonly diseases will be banished into temporary *ongons*.

Zol Zayaach (zol za-yaach): *Ongon* of good fortune; its *ongon* has male and female figures and decorations are added to it every time a fortunate event happens.⁵⁹

zuud (zood): Dream; dreaming is *zuudlehe* (zood-le-huh).

zuun (zoon): The eastern direction.

zuun mod (zoon mod): See *aiha*.

Footnotes

[*1.](#) A Mongolian salutation in common use as a closure for letters or book introductions. It means “greeting you with a true heart.”

[*2.](#) I prefer the spelling “Chinggis” over “Ghengis” as the latter is too different from the original pronunciation. Chinggis Khan is very highly revered by Mongolian shamans who find the appellation “Genghis” objectionable. Furthermore the traditional English spelling evokes many negative stereotypes that clash with the way that practitioners of Mongolian shamanism perceive him.

[*3.](#) In the shamanic literature the word *shamanizing* reflects the Mongolian word *buuleh*, which means “to act as a shaman” or “to be in shamanic trance.”

[*4.](#) Cuckoos do not build their own nests; they lay eggs in the nests of other birds. When they hatch, young cuckoos resemble their nest-mates, but when they mature they are different from their supposed siblings. Shamans are different from their siblings as well because their *udha* spirits shape how their personalities develop.

[*5.](#) Haan Hormasta is one of the chief *tenger* of the western direction

Endnotes

Preface

1. Caroline Humphrey and Urgunge Onon, *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Dagur Mongols* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 82.

Chapter 1

1. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 248.
2. A. F. Anisimov, "The Shaman's Tent of the Evenks and the Origins of the Shamanistic Rite," in *Studies in Shamanism*, ed. Henry N. Michael, Arctic Institute of North America, no. 4 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 165; in the same volume, see also V. N. Chernestov, "Concepts of the Soul among Ob Ugrians," p. 34.
3. M. G. Levin and L. P. Potapov, *The Peoples of Siberia* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 601.
4. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 248.
5. Ibid., p. 218; Walter Kihm, "Zum Symbolik in Shamanismus" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Freiburg im Breisgau, 1974), p. 189.
6. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 248.
7. Ibid., p. 362.

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1. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 208.
2. Ibid., p. 362.
3. N. A. Alekseev, "Shamanism Among the Turkic Peoples of Siberia," in *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religions in Siberia and Central Asia*, ed. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1981), pp. 52–53, 175; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trebner, and Co., 1935), p. 128.
4. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 178; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 57.
5. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 52.
6. Alekseev, "Shamanism," pp. 62–63, 67; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 130.
7. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 190; Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, pp. 279–80.
8. Krystyna Chabros, *Beckoning Fortune: A Study of the Mongolian dallaga Ritual* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), p. 45; Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 91.
9. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, pp. 85, 93.
10. Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 757.
11. Chernestov, "Concepts of the Soul," p. 22; Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 103.
12. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 103.
13. Caroline Humphrey, "The Host and the Guest: 100 Rules of Good Behaviour in Rural Mongolia," *Journal of Anglo-Mongolian Society* 10, no. 1 (1987):44; Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 281.
14. Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 278.
15. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 35.
16. Ibid., p. 35.
17. Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 649.
18. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 206.

- [19.](#) Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 592.
- [20.](#) Ibid., p. 757.
- [21.](#) Ibid., p. 565.
- [22.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 89.
- [23.](#) Ibid.; Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 757.
- [24.](#) Humphrey, "The Host and the Guest," p. 44.
- [25.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 128.
- [26.](#) Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 311.
- [27.](#) Ibid.

Chapter 3

- [1.](#) Chernetsov, "Concepts of the Soul," p. 6; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 135; Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 80.
- [2.](#) Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 128.
- [3.](#) Ibid., p. 142.
- [4.](#) Ibid., p. 134.
- [5.](#) V. Napolskikh, "Proto-Uralic World Picture: A Reconstruction," in *Northern Religions and Shamanism*, ed. Mihaly Hoppal and Juha Penttinen (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1992), pp. 11–14.
- [6.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 195; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 138.
- [7.](#) Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 138.
- [8.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 83.
- [9.](#) Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 141.
- [10.](#) Magdalena Tatar, "Tragic and Stranger Ongons among the Altaic Peoples," *Altaistic Studies: Papers at the 25th Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference at Uppsala June 7–11, 1982* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiskell, 1982), pp. 65–67.
- [11.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 20.
- [12.](#) Ibid.
- [13.](#) Ibid., pp. 242–43; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, pp. 196–97.
- [14.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 185.
- [15.](#) Ibid., p. 125.
- [16.](#) Ibid., p. 131.

Chapter 4

- [1.](#) Dash-Nyamaa S. Dugarov, *Istoricheskiye Kornya Byelogo Shamanizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), pp. 275–76; Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 51; Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 713.
- [2.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 239; Kihm, "Zum Symbolik im Schamanismus," pp. 193–94.
- [3.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, pp. 141–42.
- [4.](#) Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 133.
- [5.](#) A. Mikhailov, *Religioznaya Mifologiya* (Ulan-Ude: Buryat Cultural Ministry, 1996), pp. 60–61.
- [6.](#) Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 288.
- [7.](#) N. Basilev, "Chosen by the Spirits," in *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religions in Siberia and Central Asia*, ed. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1981), p. 37; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 290.

8. Vilmos Dioszegi, *Tracing Shamans in Siberia* (Oosterhout, The Netherlands: Anthropological Publications, 1972), p. 251; Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), p. 18.
9. Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 357.
10. Basilov, "Chosen by the Spirits," pp. 44–45.
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12. Michael J. Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. xii–xiv; Michael Ripinsky-Naxon, *The Nature of Shamanism* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993), p. 162.
13. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 259.
14. Alekseev, *Shamanism*, p. 55.

Chapter 5

1. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 179.
2. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 257.
3. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 31.

Chapter 6

1. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 183.
2. Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 256.
3. Ibid., pp. 255–56.

Chapter 7

1. Direct contact can be made with the Golomt Center through the Internet. They have two Web sites, one based in Ulaanbaatar, and another in Ulan-Ude in Buryatia. The addresses are: <http://www.geocities.com/rainforest/vines/2186/mongolia/mongolia.htm> <http://www.geocities.com/athens/oracle/8226/index.html> The first is the main Golomt page, while the second is about Buryat shamanism and culture. The pages present extensive information about the theory of Mongolian shamanism, mythology, terms, rituals, and the Mongolian shamanist calendar, as well as links to other valuable sources of information about Mongolia, Buryatia, and shamanism.
2. See the Buryat Home Page to see the ritual calendar for the Doloon Uvgun.
3. Wasilewski, p. 61.
4. The Nadia Stepanova video, "Nadia Stepanova, Buryatian Shamanism," is available from: Where the Eagles Fly, Via Pantelleria 1, 13048 Santhia (VC), Italy.
5. *The Lake Baikal Guidebook* may also be available from Arthur Pedersen. His e-mail address is ADPedersen@aol.com The Russian Information Service of Burlington, Vermont is another possible source for the guidebook.

Chapter 8

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2. Ibid.
3. Uradyn Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 82–83, 86–88; Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 6.
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- [5.](#) Ibid.
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- [7.](#) Ibid., p. 578.
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- [9.](#) Ibid., p. 713; Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 142.
- [10.](#) Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 711.
- [11.](#) Ibid., p. 357.
- [12.](#) Alekseev, "Shamanism," p. 62.
- [13.](#) Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, pp. 649, 681, 711.
- [14.](#) Alekseev, "Shamanism," pp. 62, 66.
- [15.](#) Ibid., p. 50.
- [16.](#) Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, p. 132.
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- [18.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 128.
- [19.](#) Levin and Potapov, *Peoples of Siberia*, p. 578.
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- [21.](#) Ibid., p. 711.
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- [41.](#) Humphrey and Onon, *Shamans and Elders*, p. 217.
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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Sarangerel.

Riding windhorses : a journey into the heart of Mongolian
shamanism / Sarangerel.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

print ISBN: 978-0-89281-808-2

ebook ISBN: 978-1-59477-538-3

1. Shamanism—Mongolia. 2. Shamanism—Siberia. I. Title

BL2370.S5 S84 2000

299'.42—dc21

00-021150

Electronic edition produced by



www.dmiepub.com