

## ❁ CUSTOM OF SHEARING SHEEP

Mongolians have a long standing tradition of manually processing the wool and hair of the five kinds of animals for use in their daily life. At the end of spring and the beginning of summer, the animals have grown fat on the fresh green grass and start to shed their coat. The manes of horses are cut; the coat of cattle is combed; the beard of camels is clipped; the wool of sheep is sheared; and the down of goats is carded. The hair from these animals is processed continually throughout the summer and autumn. There is a tradition to process these in cooperation with relatives and people in the vicinity. They gather and work at each other's homes in alternation.

The processing of sheep wool is very specific. There are two types of shearing sheep in Mongolia. The summer shearing is called fleece (*urtiin noos*) and autumn shearing is called fleece-wool (*akhar*).

In the summer, the first shearing of wool can be undertaken without the differences of age and sex of the sheep. But in autumn, the shearing the wool of the ewe sheep cannot be taken in order to keep these animals safer in winter. This is traditional.

Preparations for the shearing are done at the end of spring. The sheep shearing day is announced to the people in the vicinity. Relatives or neighbours in the vicinity come with shears and strips to bind the legs of the sheep to assist

in the shearing. If the chosen day is rainy or stormy, they clip only a piece of wool. After this, they can shear their sheep the next time the opportunity presents itself. Before the arrival of assistants, the head of the family starts shearing sheep. When one of the neighbors arrives to assist, he says:

*May the shears be sharp  
May the fleece be fluffy*

or

*May the shears be sharp  
May the sheared sheep  
Be tens or hundreds of thousands  
May the dust from these sheep  
Rise up to the sky*

As a response, the head of family gratefully replies:

*May you be as prosperous as you wish  
Thanks with pleasure,  
Commensurate with your desire*

The custom of preparing fleece-wool in the autumn is the same as with the first shearing.

