

❖ CUSTOM OF NAMING AND GIVING ABLUTION TO A CHILD



Mongolians consider childbirth as a good omen. We say that when a child is born, its food is predestined, that is why childbirth is an exceptional event in our life. So we perform an ablution to the child in order to honor the one who has adapted the form of a precious human body and has been born on the earth as a little citizen of the state. This new member is washed ceremonially with pure water of its birthplace and its life-long name is given to him or her by his or her parents and relatives. The ceremonial washing of a child is performed within 6-7 days of its birth among its parents and close relatives. The ablution of the child can be performed within 16 days upon the circumstance of life and work.

Dairy products, cooked meat, and fermented mare's milk are prepared for guests, but the drinking of vodka is traditionally forbidden. The feasting should be ended before sunset, just as wedding rituals end before sunset.

A sheep is butchered at the moment when a child is born. We clean the intestine and stuff seasoned blood into it. Then we cook the blood stuffed intestine, sheep's liver and kidney, and pieces of tail's fat. We respect and offer a practical midwife a saddle of mutton. Members of the *Myangad* tribe bring pails with skewered meat, shin-bones, fat of the tail, and cooked rectum to the midwife and child. They then wave this food before them and give a piece of meat three times, saying "*Khurai, khurai, khurai.*" The remnants of this meal are kept for three days. Then the parents (father and mother of the child) can eat them. This kind of food at the child's ablution is a sign of honour.

The ablution of the child is performed at the appointed

time as soon as the feast starts. The midwife washes the infant with strong tea or soup. The very popular method among the Mongolians is to wash the infant with the salted broth of cooked meat garnished with grain and powdered juniper needles. The salt cleans the infant's body and the juniper needles sanctify the infant. The grain symbolizes the wish to be multitudinous.

The parents of the infant offer the honorary scarf to the midwife or the senior person who will give the name to the child. The midwife can give the child a name which she considers to be auspicious. The parents may also write down several names on scraps of paper and then roll those papers up and put them into a vase with grain. Then vase is shaken several times. The rolled papers appear on the surface of the grain in the vase. One of the papers is chosen and read. This name is whispered into the right ear of a boy and the left ear of a girl three times. Then the name is announced to all gathered.

This kind of whispering to the right or left ear is linked to the ancient Mongolian tradition that the western or left side belongs to man and the right or eastern side belongs to woman. The use of grain in the vase symbolizes that the child's fame will be as abundant as grains in a jar. Mongolians say, "Your parents can give you your name, but only you yourself can attain your fame."

The naming of a child symbolizes happiness, health and goodness. The choice of names reflects people's wishes and values. If a child is born on Thursday, he or she can be named *Pürevjav* (*pürev* is a sanskrit word meaning "fourth day"; *jav* is "salvation" in Tibetan). If the child is born on Sunday, he

or she can be named as *Nyamjav* (*nyam* is the Tibetan word “sun”; so, *nyamjav* is “sun-salvation”). Naming a child, for some families, is very delicate. Some families name their child *Muu-nokhoi* (bad dog), *Khünbish* (not human), or *Bibish* (I am not). To protect the child from death, parents may give their children names like *Terbish* (that is not), *Adilbish* (that is not similar to), or names such as “dog” and “mendicant.” Other types of names include *Tömör* (iron) and *Ölchir* (hardy). According to superstition, these names can help children avoid evil spirits who can bring harm to the child.

All of those who attend the child’s abluion give presents to the newborn child. Particularly, the midwife gives a gift to the new infant. Close relatives can give foals, lambs, or baby-camels. These animal gifts are an asset for the future livestock-breeder.

Exceptional gifts for child include a sheathed knife, a bow and arrow, a bridle and saddle, and tools. Parents can give gifts to the guests, as well.

At the abluion of the child, we sing lullabies, songs symbolizing the infant’s future, and songs that extol the parents’ kindness. In earlier times, there was a custom which was called the child’s endowment. It says:

*May the child experience wholesomeness
And be beneficial for humankind and the environment
By ridding us of the nine misdeeds,
May the child
See a hundred autumns,
By living for a hundred years
May the child be stronger than ore,
May the child’s offspring multiply more than grain!
Khurai, khurai, khurai!*

This kind of well-wishing is a very old form of benediction. The words of the benediction explain the purpose of the ceremonial custom and share the happiness of the new parents. The content of the benediction consists of two parts. The first part of the benediction speaks about how the child’s parents met, fell in love, and conceived their offspring. The second part of the benediction speaks about a child’s destiny to be healthy under one’s parental affections and to grow up to be a good and respected person in one’s community.

*You, benevolent, are gathered
To make a bountiful feast;
We wish the newborn child
All the best;
We are proud of this noble child
Who became a precious human being;
You can reach two years of age
Your first hair can grow
You can recognize your parents
With your pretty eyes
You can reach four years of age
You can visit your neighbours
You can reach five years of age
And help your parents
Then it continues, speaking about life:
This benediction wishes you
To be kind to your parents
Be a support to your relatives
Serve your country meritoriously
Be world-famous
Be a good person
I say this benediction
For your noble child*

This symbolizes the child’s future. This benediction is the request of the community and wishes of the Mongolian people.