

## RELIGIOUS RITES

### ❖ SHAMANISTIC TRADITIONS



Shamanism is one of the oldest forms of religion in Mongolia. It has been developed on the basis of the belief in totemism and dates back to 300 to 400 BC. The Huns, ancestors of the Mongolians, worshiped shamanism and made it the state religion. Since then the people of Mongol origin, who lived in the territory of Mongolia, have been worshiped shamanism. The word shaman (*böö*) is a common noun that can be divided into two categories: a male shaman (*büge*) and a female shaman (*idugan*). Hun and Mongol people worshiped the sun and the moon, and made sacrificial offerings to the heavens, the earth, spirits, and their ancestors.

The main rite of shamanism is to worship and sacrifice heaven. Shamanism venerates the blue sky and green earth. In shamanism, there are 55 deities (*Tenger*) of the west who are well disposed towards humans and 44 deities (*Tenger*) of the east who cause all misfortunes. Shamanism worships a total of 99 deities. These deities are answerable to the clans or tribes, including individual persons, before the power of nature. In addition, in shamanism there are water spirits (*lus*), and mountain spirits (*savdag*), as well as souls and amulets. Devotees worship these objects as their guardians.

The life of the hunters is devoted to catching beasts. There is a notion that the dispositions of wild beasts are linked to the spirits. This established a relationship between hunters and wild beasts and created a method for how to deal with them, together with rules on how to kill or control them. The rites involving libations and consecrations were established, as was a habit to preserve nature and conserve wild beasts. These habits became traditions that have been observed by nomadic peoples from generation to generation. Over time, the skills and methods used to domesticate some wild animals and to hunt others were transferred to animal breeders. The animal breeders then started worshipping nature, mountains, waters, and the sun



Shaman's costume and tools



and moon. These rituals formed and spread widely and have been performed and maintained up to the present day.

In shamanism there is a view that every being has a spirit. The invocations, incantations, and consecrations in shamanism are performed by shamans, who are considered to be unusual and to possess the magical power or “*ongon*” of the spirits. There are three varieties of spirits. The first is the soul of a living being or of the body flesh obtained from the mother; the second is the conscience of thinking, which is the soul of bones obtained from the father; and the third is the soul, reincarnation, or spirit separated from the body after death. In shamanism, the spirit is a life in the body. If the spirit is separated from the body, the living body dies. There are the notions of invocation of spirit and exorcism of the evil spirit. The shamans perform rituals of the incantations, invocations and exorcism.

The aggregation of shamanistic views can be considered in the following sense:

1. The preference for the penetration of the shamanistic spirit. The role of the shaman is to regulate and pacify them.
2. The preference to invite the shaman’s *ongon*, which serves to support good deeds and to drive away evil spirits. The *ongon* abides in holy places, so they are invited in to demonstrate their supernatural power.
3. The preference for the magical ability of shamanism in exorcising evil spirits. Devotees believe that the *ongon* of

spirits can drive out misfortune, illness, and evil spirits with the guardian power of shamans. For instance, it is said in an invocation that exorcises evil spirits:

We let you free,

*When the horns of goats reach into space  
When the scut of camels drags along the ground  
When field hares grow horns  
When calves shall have tusks*

Rituals are the main elements of Mongolian shamanism and play very important role in its practices. There are two important entities that shamanic rituals seek to invoke or influence. The first is the White Heaven, which controls everything in the western direction. The other is the heart-shaped Black Heaven, which controls everything in the eastern direction. The shamanic rites seek to invoke the ninety-nine deities, to whom offerings are made. There are also the mountain-rites, cairn-rites, and tree-rites and spring-rites, all of which are related to the traditions and rituals of worshipping the earth as Mother. Together with them, there are the fire-rites, ancestor-rites, saddle-thongs rites, destiny-rites, and horse-rites. There are also the entrance-rites and lightning-rites. Shamanist rites assume that nature has godliness. Shamans use the rites to get into contact with this godliness, which occurs while the shamans are in a trance.



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