

❖ FIRE WORSHIPPING CEREMONIES



December 23rd and 24th of every lunar year are, for Mongolians, the days of worshipping fire. On December 23rd, the deity of fire appears and informs Indra about the living beings of the universe. The worshipping of fire of the Mongols has traversed many centuries, undergone various changes, and adapted to diverse local spaces, but its general tenor is the same.

The masters of fire are called as “Mother of fire”, “Song of fire”, “Heaven of mother-fire” “Daughter-deity of fire,” and “Heaven of fire”. Since Buddhism spread over Mongolia, the name “Hermit heaven, King of the Fire *Meraja*” has become commonly used.

The preparation for worship is the first act of these rituals. Then the fire deity is invited. Offerings are made to them. Then the ode to fire is recited, and a prayer and statement for fire deities and a benediction are uttered. Then we entrust the fire deity to make the devotees healthy and wealthy and solicit offering in a melodious tune. The offerings of worship were shared with all the participants. The proceedings of the rituals of worshipping fire are established in detail. For example, the colour of fire is red, so the breast of a sheep is covered by red threads. We regard the *khyalgana* as the best sort of grass for animals and put a piece of this grass on it. As we call upon horses to be scattered over the valley, we offer the breast. We also offer ribs as an offering of camels, rectum of sheep as an offering of sheep, and the area outside of the breast as an offering of goats. We kindle ghee lamps and incense on four sides of the trivet to prevent a fire from the evils. The offerings to the fire must be sanctimonious. So, wood for the fire worship are collected from the places where animals do not tread. The breast meat, which is used for worship, is prepared in the autumn and kept in a store cleanly.

Mongolians celebrate the ritual of worshipping fire as the “small Lunar Month” and perform them according to the established rules. The statement, invocation, and benediction of worshipping fire were orally transmitted and, later, they written in sutras and books. Here, let us quote a short benediction of worshipping fire:

*We pray by proffering grease
To the noble spirit of fire
Flaming as a cloud;
Feeding the ground with its warmth
May a good omen prevail the world over!
We drop melted grease on
Your flame and pray for you;
We may stay in boundless ecstasy
By having numberless animals
By sanctifying this holy spirit of worship;
Let our animals increase
Let our life be longer
Let us live in incomparable rapture;
We beseech the offerings
From magnanimous mother-fire
Whose origins are from heaven
Whose birth was from earth
Khurai, khurai, khurai!*

*We beseech an offering
From fire heaven
Whose origin is from Heaven
Whose birth is from the green earth.
Khurai, khurai, khurai!*

*We beseech a bounty
From the propitious mother-fire
Whose origin from powerful Heaven
Whose birth is from mother-earth
Khurai, khurai, khurai!*

*We beseech the bounty of
Longevity and animals
From the sacred fire Heaven
Starting from a golden planet
Khurai, khurai, khurai!*





*We beseech an offering
Of the group of camels ruled by the camel stallion
And of the herd of cows ruled by the bull
From the lambent fire
Khurai, khurai, khurai!
We beseech an offering of gold, silver and money
For the family and individuals
A harem of horses
From lambent mother-fire
Khurai, khurai, khurai!*

*We beseech a flock of sheep, a source of happiness
From the holy fire-heaven
Which is the origin of hearth and altar;
Dear fire-mother*

*Please give a piece from
Your body like a mountain;
Dear mother-fire
Split a piece
Of your body like rock and give it to us;
Dear light-mother
Break off a piece
Of your body like the Geser and give it to us;
Sanctified mother
Cut off a piece of
Your body like the ocean and give it to us;
The spirits of
The thick maned stallion
And of the mare with the caked udder
Khurai, khurai, khurai!*

❖ TABOOS CONCERNING FIRE WORSHIP AND THE FAMILY HEARTH

Mongolians venerate the fire and hearth as holy and have many taboos originated from the rites and customs concerned with it. For instance:

- Non-members of a family or strangers are not entitled to stoke a family's fire. If he or she stokes a fire of another family, it can be considered as an insult to a family's hearth;
- It is forbidden to cross the northern part of a family's hearth. If this happens, it is a sign of disrespect or humiliation;
- It is forbidden for one to go around the hearth in a counter-clockwise direction;
- It is forbidden to stoke a fire with an iron poker within a week of the ceremony of worshipping fire (this is considered to be a period of the absence of the fire-god);
- Maternal nieces are forbidden to enter when the maternal uncle's ceremony of worshipping fire is performed;
- It is forbidden to give dairy products and grains to somebody within three days of the ceremony of worshipping fire;
- Mothers who recently gave birth are forbidden to come near the burning fire;
- It is forbidden to burn anything that can defile a fire or make it dirty;
- It is forbidden to pour water on a fire (If we need to extinguish a fire with water, we say, "Please take off your legs, dear god of fire," in advance and extinguish the fire);
- It is forbidden to spit into a fire;
- It is forbidden to play with fire (If one does this, it is considered as the loss of animals);
- It is forbidden to trample a fire in extinguishing it;
- It is forbidden to sit down with parted legs near a hearth or fire place;

-It is forbidden for a pregnant mother to be present during the ceremony of worshipping fire when milk-vodka and melted grease are dropped onto a fire (It is believed that the pregnant mother would be at risk of a miscarriage. So it is considered as a danger.);

- It is forbidden to go cross over a fire;
- It is forbidden to drop milk on a fire (It is believed that the udder of cow might break.);
- It is forbidden to wave a red cloth over a fire;
- It is forbidden to stab a fire with a knife;
- It is forbidden to burn dog faeces and the skins of onion and garlic;
- It is forbidden to burn Artemisia.

There is a saying:

*Do not sanctify your fire with artemisia.
Do not infect your corral of sheep with parasites.*

- It is forbidden to drop salt on a fire (Only when we drive out evils, do we burn salt);
- It is forbidden to point one's finger at a fire (It is believed that the god of fire might get angry.); and
- It is forbidden to stand or sit on the stove or trivet.

There are many forbidden practices concerning fire and the fire-worship ceremonies in ancient law. People were subjected to severe punishment if they assaulted someone's hearth. We, Mongolians, venerate fire, sun and moon in our genius and wish our hearth and altar to be holy forever and as prosperous as the flames of fire.