

CUSTOMS RELATED TO THE HOUSEHOLD

Customs related to the household and human life include social events (childbirth, weddings, celebrations and funerals) that occur in the life of a family or community. Oral poetry and traditional customs express a family's or community's feelings of respect, well-wishing, or sorrow for a person or persons. Benedictions and songs are performed to a great extent in the celebrations of those events related to an individual's household. They thus also express aspects of traditional ethics and morality, points of view, and senses of beauty of the Mongolian nomadic people.

If you look at the customs of the household superficially, it seems rather personal; indeed one member of society shares one's exceptional experience with others in one's own community. However, the oral poetry used in customary events of a Mongol's household reflects characteristics of nomadic herder's labour. Cutting a child's hair for the first time, for instance, or giving a name to a newborn, creating children's toys and games, wearing a new *deel* (traditional gown) for the first time, adopting a child, conducting a wedding, setting up a new *ger*, or celebrating an anniversary (or birthday) are all forms of the customs related to the household with distinct characteristics.

❁ CUSTOMS OF GREETING



The customs Mongols have for greeting and showing respect toward others is traditionally quite rich. When guests arrive at someone's *ger* they say *nokhoi khori* (hold the dog) before getting off the horse. Thereafter, when someone comes out and holds the dog, the guest takes his *khet khutga* (knife) from his belt and gets off the horse. After tying his horse to the hitching post, the guest enters the *ger*.

If there are two or more people in the *ger*, the guest greets them saying *sain baitsgaana uu?* meaning "Are you all well?"; or if there is only one person in the *ger*, he greets this person by saying *Sain baina uu ta?*, meaning "Are you well?" The act of taking the knife from the belt expresses that the guest has no thoughts of harming the family.

The head of family invites the guest to take a seat. Ac-

According to the seasonal characteristics, the guest greets them by asking the family if they are getting through (or passing) the summer (winter, spring, autumn) well. Then the family replies that they are getting through the season very well and asks the guest the same question. The family asks the guest, "From where are you coming," "Where are you heading to," and "What is the purpose of your journey," all while offering tea and food as a sign of respect.

If the guest comes when the new tea or meal is being prepared, it is believed that his journey will continue very well. Consequently, the guest speaks about the place where he is coming from and going to and the purpose of his or her journey. Following the exchanging of their names, they exchange snuff bottles and tobacco pipes with each other, while the conversation about current conditions in the pasture, such as the health of the livestock, its fertility, how well or bad this year's grass has grown, and how the weather has been. If the visitor is coming from far away, the family lets him stay and rest overnight.

If the guest is someone with whom the family is previously familiar, the conversation takes place about news related to their job or events taking place with their family. It is a custom that the younger person greets the oldest person first. If two people come across to each other in a pasture or on a road, the two greet and pass on their right sides. If not in a hurry, they get off of the horse and greet each other while sitting and exchanging their snuff bottles or tobacco pipes. Consequently, they go on their ways after having friendly conversation. During the rituals of felt making, fleece beating, foal branding and other customary events, people mutually share with each other well wishing poems and benedictions as respect.

❖ CUSTOM OF PREPARING TOYS

Mongolians have the custom of preparing children's toys. Toys are not merely meant to amuse babies or infants, they can also symbolize auspicious omens. For instance, traditional toys can consist of felt cut into animal shapes with scissors, small bows and arrows, a herring-bone tag, or a bell. They are often dangled from the ceiling spokes of a *ger*. According to a fairy-tale, parents should hang a felt-shaped fox near the infant. If there is no felt-fox, a real fox will come to a sleeping infant and tell it that its mother had died. The infant will believe this and start to cry. The sly fox says, "Your mother is not dead, your mother is alive." The infant will then become glad to hear this and will smile. If the felt-fox is present, the real fox comes and sees that it is not possible to cheat the infant, thus the infant with the felt-fox never cries while sleeping. It is a superstitious belief that infants converse with a fox in its sleep.

