

# **KHARA-GYRGÄN: FIRST BURYAT SPIDER-SHAMAN**

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## **Abstract**

*As humankind's earliest expression of spirituality and healing technique, the legacy of shamanism continues in the modern-day Mongolia. There are many myths concerning the origin and ways of the shaman. Myth of the First Buryat Spider-Shaman is interpreted in this paper which indicates in principles the fundamental practice of this primitive medicinal tradition. The myth of Khara-Gyrgän gives the precise shamanic procedure in the act of healing and redeeming the suffering soul. Since the outbreak of the pandemic from Wuhan, every traditional healing technique could be questioned for their efficacy because none but allopathic approach alone can fight and save the individual against the sufferings inflicted by the virus. Still we consider the past practices belonging to the ancestors and deities, and give them respectable space in research.*

*In the land presided over by ninety nine Tengri—Sky Gods/Spirits—of which fifty five are white or benevolent and forty four are black or malevolent, the following myth about mythical Khara-Gyrgän is concerned with the origin of the principle manner in which a black shaman should conduct oneself in the healing ministry. The myth gives a picture of the medical exam in the archaic sense.*

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## **MYTH OF THE FIRST BURYAT SPIDER-SHAMAN**

‘The “first shaman”, Khara-Gyrgän, having declared that his power was boundless, God put him to the test. God took a girl’s soul and shut it up in a bottle. To make sure that it would not escape, God put his finger into the neck of the bottle. The shaman flew through the sky, sitting on his drum, discovered the girl’s soul and, to set it free, changed into a spider and stung God in the face. God instantly pulled out his finger and the girl’s soul escaped. Furious, God curtailed Khara-Gyrgän’s power, and after that the magical abilities of shamans markedly diminished’ (Eliade, 1989, p. 68).

## **HYPOTHETICAL INTERPRETATION**

*Khara* in Mongolian language means black, serving as the title for the shamanic office. The myth belongs to the tradition of the black shamans among the Buryat people of Mongolia. ‘The distinction is clearly marked among the Buryat, who speak of “white” shamans (*sagani bö*) and “black” shamans (*karain bö*), the former having relations with the gods, the latter with the spirits’ (Eliade, 1989, p. 185). As a medium between *Khukhe Monke Tengri*—Eternal Blue Sky—who is the Supreme Deity and the people who dwell on the land, the black shaman is concerned with the protection and healing from the evil spirits. Black shaman “has evil spirits as helpers” (Eliade, 1989, p. 150) thus he/she can defend against their influence. As the Aztec symbolism wherein black has come to signify war due to the use of the black obsidian glass as the cutting edge of battle swords, the Buryat black shaman is a spirit-warrior against the evil spirits. The way of the black shaman is to know and fight the spirits. A black shaman specializes in the spiritual warfare.

Since sickness does not have one single classification, there is all the possibility, from spiritual perspective, that some of our inner and outer experiences are “soulish”. What is “soulish” is not what is emerging from the spirit above. Dreams and lived experiences termed as “soulish” are those that are embedded in our passions, wishes, desires *etc.* “Soulish” experiences are according to the willed ways of the individual to fulfill love and life as one fancy. Soulsh individual serves the mammon (St Matthew 6: 24), labor for the food that perishes (St. John 6: 27),

tries to gain as much world as possible (St. Mark 8: 36), consequently suffer the loss of one's soul. The loss of soul is an archaic and spiritual way to conceptualize sickness that requires soul-retrieval as its remedy. Soul-retrieval is central to shamanism as an archaic medical practice and tradition that concentrates on healing the soul.

#### Declaration and Diminishing of Powers

*Khara-Gyrgän* is an ordained shaman by the virtue of the fact that he is bestowed with powers. Declaration of the boundless powers by *Khara-Gyrgän* is the acceptance of his vocation in all its vastness. Like goodness, evil knows no bounds. *Khara-Gyrgän* should be able to deal with every kind of evil under the sun.

In order to become a consummate shaman, *Khara-Gyrgän* must undergo evaluation: ability to enter ecstatic trance, become one with the spirit guide, conduct an aerial flight through the medium the drum—in the Buryat and Yakut traditions, the drum is known as the “shaman's horse” (Eliade, 1989, p. 173)—cross the familiar world in his mystical-magical journey, travel to the world of souls and spirits to discover and capture the lost soul and retrieve the same. This is the shamanic procedure displayed in the myth, which every living shaman follows.

Like we have the instrumental communication without seeing the ones we know, the drum for a shaman is instrumental in entering the state of trance, and into the unseen world inhabited by the invisibles.

In pursuit of soul-retrieval, even though the black shaman (or the white shaman) has extra-human, transpersonal, capacities, he still remains natural and earthly like the common man. God's wrath, like in the Book of Genesis 3: 14-19, becomes the curse and the reality of human limitations. Diminishing of the shamanic powers in the myth is the acknowledgment to do whatever is humanly possible according to the gift of healing received by the shaman.

Carl Jung wisely writes: “Only the gods can pass over the rainbow bridge; mortal men must stick to the earth and are subject to its laws” (Jacobi, 1953, p. 127).

#### Finger and Face of God

God has entrapped a girl's soul in a bottle: the bottle in-itself is a feminine symbol. The symbolic and secular meaning of the girl's soul represents every sufferer stifled and ensnared by gods/spirits.

The soul of the girl is unconsciously universal and undifferentiated in characteristic: images of the *animus* are multiple and a female is every woman. Individuality of a female has more than one soul-image within, even men in slang are called ‘ladies’, in everyday language ‘bitch’ can be used for both females and males, and, like the song by Chaka Khan (Yvette Marie Stevens) in 1978, every female can state: “I'm Every Woman”. The classic song was repeated by Whitney Houston in 1993.

Spider being the tutelary animal is ‘*khubilgan*’, term that can be interpreted as “metamorphosis” (from *khubilku*, “to change oneself,” “to take another form”) (Eliade, 1989, p. 94). Spider is *Khara-Gyrgän*'s “soul in animal form...life soul” (Eliade, 1989, p. 94). The spider as the helping spirit of *Khara-Gyrgän* enables him to transform. It is his *alter ego* in a transformed state of being. The helping spirit, like the ancestral spirits, “carry the shaman to beyond (sky, underworld), reveal the mysteries to him, teach him...” (Eliade, 1989, p. 95). Symbolic rationale for transforming into a spider is to go beyond the confinement of human territory, possess spider-senses to detect the emotional state and other details of the creature caught, and exhibit craftiness and aggression in fighting with the evil spirits in order to maintain the web of human phenomena.

*Khara-Gyrgän* encountering God is indicative of his ecstatic voyage to the “Center of the World” (Eliade, 1989, p. 173). *Khara-Gyrgän* display the use of his shamanic powers before and in the face of God—the sting—in an efficacious manner, the quality which every black shaman should demonstrate to free the souls from the spirits that impend health and prosperity.

Contrary to the Pandora's Box, the vessel of enslavement becomes that of emancipation—the demonstration of healing procedure by *Khara-Gyrgän* reveals the way to redeem the souls touched by and trapped due to the evils of the fate and the baleful spirits. Release of the girl's soul issues benediction and gift of healing for the line of black

shamans in the order of *Khara-Gyrgän*. This is the mythological, mystical and magical legacy of the beatific vision of *Khara-Gyrgän* and the black shamanism.

#### REFERENCES

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