

SIBERIAN CASTANEDA



The power of lineage

KUENA TODD

Dear reader,
“The call of the spirits. Authentic shamanism” is a unique literary work,
a story that reflects the outlook and practices of Siberian shamans.
This book is a real guide to Siberian shamanism.
Attention! This book bares a special code. The more times you read it, the
sooner all your problems will be solved.

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PART 1

Prologue or the Beginning of the Story

Saosh Yant, an eager, lucky and daring young man with intense black eyes, a handsome face with big regular features, a strong young body and sturdy, tough legs, was an otherworldly person from a very early age. Even as a baby, when all other babies quietly slept in their cradles, surrounded by soft wavering light from the fireplace and the monotonous singing of their mothers, he already had self-awareness and could understand everything people said. Moreover, his soul constantly travelled in the upperworlds communicating with the Gods, which would dissolve in that infinite Power, Knowledge and Bliss. The spirits of the land freely communicated with him, informing him of events around him. Ayamy, the guardian spirit of the land where he was born, sang her lullabies to him. He was receiving power and energy from nature itself. As he was growing up, he was turning into a strong and healthy person.

"He'll be a mighty man," his father would say with satisfaction. "Look how strong he is already."

His mother would nod in agreement. All his relatives already were seeing him as an able hunter or fisherman. However, they had no idea about one important thing: the Gods had sealed his fate in a very different way... When he had grown up a little, the power of limitation, which influences all living creatures on the Earth, started influencing him too. Getting older, leaving behind one year after another, he became aware that his direct interactions with the Cosmos were becoming less frequent, more fragmentary and shorter. The unearthly visions were becoming rarer. Voices of the spirits sounded less and less often. The Cosmos seemed to be "imploding" in front of his eyes, and he was submerging into everyday mundanity. When did it happen? It is hard to tell for sure. It was likely a gradual and lengthy process. Probably it started when he was learning to speak. Yes, yes. Nothing else but descriptions of the world in words could deprive him of the ability to perceive reality directly. So, by and by, he became aware of his limitations, though, in this respect, he was like the overwhelming majority of humans on our planet...

However, the Power that led him through his life claimed its right. It would storm into his being. Such things happen to every true shaman in the beginning of their journey. If somebody tells you that he became a

shaman without it, be aware that it is a lie. This person is not a true shaman. More likely, he styles himself as one, not, in fact, being one. Every time Saosh Yant would feel the approaching of that Power, it would come to him, destroying all former modes of perception and patterns of behavior and making him act in, frankly, rather peculiar ways. He began to communicate with the spirits, often even speaking aloud. His behaviour was becoming abnormal. If he had been a resident of a large metropolis and if his parents had been totally detached from traditions, they would have promptly put him in a mental hospital. There, his gift would have been ruined. However, he was lucky. He was born not in a metropolis but in the taiga.

Later, after a couple of years, by a twist of fate, they moved to a small town where people still remembered the old traditions and respected the knowledge of their ancestors. There, his parents learned of such things.

With no delay, they introduced him to a great shaman, a benefactor of the local folks. His name was Kuday Kam. His abilities were outstanding! He had ailing people on their feet with a mere word. He could deliver people from feebleness, melancholy and sorrow. He could see the whereabouts of a missing person. He could tell the spot where an animal would show up. He knew what the weather would be like without listening to weather forecasts. That unique man was endowed with enormous abilities, power and might. Many people even feared him a little and gave him a wide berth. According to some legends, he could even punish a person for causing trouble with his relatives. He could make a person mute with a mere word or, on the contrary, drive evil spirits from him. In such cases, a bad person would fall on the ground and start weeping loudly, suffering from tremendous, almost unbearable pangs of conscience. As soon as the evil spirit left the sufferer completely, his eyes would dry out, and he would quickly gain joy and tranquillity. He then would become helpful to his relatives, tune in to the general rhythm of life and experience true happiness.

Kuday Kam did a lot of good. People loved him, and his life was full of luck. But his time was running out. His hair and beard were frosted white, and his harmonious, charismatic face had deep, distinct lines that, on the one hand, indicated the integrity of his nature but on the other hand, showed that his life was ending. He felt it himself.

Moreover, he knew in advance that a new young shaman had come into existence to replace him, and he had to teach him while there still was time. So, at last, the predestined hour having arrived, Saosh Yant visited him, accompanied by his parents. Or, more precisely, they brought Saosh Yant to the shaman.

"Great shaman, see what's wrong with him," said his father with concern.
"He's not been himself the past year," his mother added.

Kuday Kam fixed his piercing falcon eyes on him and understood everything at once.

"Good. Leave!" he said in a powerful voice.

The two parents looked at each other in puzzlement.

"As soon as he's all right, I'll let you know." Then he commanded: "Go!" They bowed to him obediently and left the great shaman's chaadyr without looking back. The shaman began to inspect his guest, a future shaman-to-be. Saosh Yant's condition was close to madness. His eyes were moving incessantly. His lips were making a gibberish consisting of fragments of words. The great Kam started the training process, conducted the ritual of shaman cut and initiated him into shaman hood. However, that is a different story...

Kuday Kam had yet to teach his young pupil many things. For that purpose, the latter had to visit him regularly.

"How can I reach you when you move from place to place all the time?" asked Saosh Yant. "Today, you're here, but tomorrow you may move elsewhere. So could you stop being a nomad for at least the period of my education? As you know, it is important for both of us. You must pass your Power to somebody, and I must learn to be a true Kam."

Kuday Kam merely chuckled and then fastened his piercing, almost unbearable gaze upon the young man. Kuday Kam was a great shaman of Siberia, possessing tremendous abilities, power and might. He has done a lot of good and helped millions of people.

"You're a weak Kam if you're unable to feel the power in this way," said the master and chuckled again.

"How can you find common people lost in the forest like this? If a person lies unconscious, are you going to say, 'I can't do it'?"

"But I've never done this," said the young pupil, still in puzzlement. "How is it possible at all?"

"Don't you worry. I'll be sending you messages about myself."

"And how will I work out where to go?"

"Tune into me."

"In what way?"

"Look closely at everything you see, and keep your ears open to everything that may sound.

Pay close attention to any feelings. If you see a sign, go that way. Keep going in that direction."

"What if there are no signs?" Saosh Yant kept on inquiring.

"You shouldn't worry about it. I will take care of everything. The main thing for you is to be alert. Be aware of everything that happens. And then I'll lead you to the right place."

"All right, I'll try," said the pupil in a more reassuring voice.

"You are to visit me next time during the season of falling leaves." Saosh Yant opened his mouth to ask the next question.

"Silence!" commanded the Great Shaman. "I'll come to you in your dreams and tell you to go to the right place. Now go home and do not look back. Tomorrow before midnight, you should be home. GO!"

Saosh Yant bowed to the ground respectfully and left the chaadyr walking backwards.

Then he headed to his house. Within several hours, he joined his family members.

"You've returned so soon, sonny," said his mother with pleasure, laying the table.

"I never expected it either," he said in surprise, eating his favourite flatbreads with honey and herbal tea. "Somehow, I walked directly through the forest, not along our paths as we usually do. And I reached home sooner."

The mother and father exchanged glances full of suggestions. Saosh Yant stopped talking, lost himself in thought, and fell asleep...

The Path Shown by the Spirit

Saosh Yant was going to the campsite where the Great Shaman Kuday Kam was staying. He did not know where the shaman would be this time, for the wise man, driven by the Power known only to him, often changed his encampment, moving from one spirit's place to another. He respectfully called these spirits the Ayami, the guardians of the land. Every area had its own Ayami, each with her own character. In the Altai foothills and as far as to where the Katun River and the Chuysky Trakt crossed dwelled a merry, young, cheerful, rosy-cheeked beauty, as fine as the Goddess Umai, patroness of fertility and abundance.

On the Ukok Plateau, near Kosh-Agach, lived a wise, sublime and majestic woman with a piercing look and proud bearing to match the God Tengri, patron of the Celestial World of Eternity. On Lake Teletskoye and its surroundings, in the Chulyshman River Valley was a stern, strict and unapproachable spirit with black fierce fathomless eyes, just like the God Erlik, patron of the shadowy world, the realm of the dead. And, in the Uymonskaya Valley and Ongudaysky District was a benevolent spirit, easy-going, friendly and creative like the God Ülgen, master of the Future World. There also were a lot of other lesser Ayami, patronesses of mountains, rivers and valleys, each subordinate to her own mistress, one of the elder

Ayami. There was a huge invisible hierarchy between them all, which was known only to Kuday Kam.

Saosh Yant was burning with curiosity, eager to learn how they interacted with one another. Young, active, ardent and daring, he wanted to have it all. The powers, knowledge and ability to command the spirits, help people, and fly freely in all the worlds. To become whatever he liked and whenever he liked. All of these things! However, for now, there was a rather difficult trial ahead of him – to find the Great Shaman and continue the apprenticeship. Kuday Kam never stayed in one place too long. First, he would follow the call of an Ayami spirit, moving to another place and communing with her. Then, after a certain time, known only to him, he would leave the lived-in place and move elsewhere.

For this reason, no one could know where he would appear next or how to find him. However, that was exactly what the novice shaman Saosh Yant had to do. He had a hard time undergoing this test for the first time. He got lost in the taiga and was led astray by evil spirits. He had all his body severely scratched by thorns and his clothes torn to shreds. He nearly broke his leg, falling off a high rock in the dark while running away from a wild boar. Hungry and utterly exhausted, desperate and sore, he was hanging between life and death. He did not know where to go or where he was at that moment. His victuals had run out, and his matches were wet with rain. Being stretched to the breaking point, in a frenzy, he called upon all the Ayami to help him remember.

The young man dropped down on his knees in despair and, weeping, screamed at the top of his voice: “He-e-elp me, great Ayami, patronesses of the sky and earth! I beg you, please, he-e-elp me!” The good spirits answered his call. They led him out into the astral world, and before him appeared a majestic, proud and beautiful woman in national festive finery, the patroness of the Ukok Plateau.

“Why are you shouting?” she asked sternly, piercing him with her black eyes. “I’m dying,” Saosh Yant whispered through his dry lips.

“The spirits have led me astray.”

“Don’t you lie to me! You have been misled not by the spirits but by your conceit.” The young man was literally agape with wonder.

“You’ve had too much belief in your OWN powers and thought that you could somehow get by ALL BY YOURSELF, without the help of the spirits, that you’d find the way. Have you found it?”

“But how do you....”

“I know all about you,” she interrupted him imperiously.

“You haven’t even held a xomus in your hands once! You think that you know all things yourself. Do you?” “No, of course not,” Saosh hung his head down.

“You know all things. Nothing can hide from you.”

“So why are you sitting then?”

“But what should I do?”

“Take your xomus and begin to play. Summon the assistant spirits. Let them show you the path.”

“But how can I....”

“And remember that without the help of the spirits, you are NOTHING!”

“But what should I....”

The majestic woman did not wait until he finished. She disappeared. The young man was again all alone in the dark. After a moment's consideration, he took out his xomus, got in the right mindset and began to play. The abyss of hopelessness was so deep that he felt and understood that if this did not help him, nothing would, for he did not have the energy to walk farther. Not to mention that he simply had no idea which way to go. Gathering his last bit of strength and fighting down the despair, he started playing the xomus. After a while, his breath evened out, his heart stopped throbbing, the stream of his thoughts now flowed in its ordinary grooves, and he entered that special state of clarity, light and understanding which you can never mistake for another. It is a special feeling of insight and clarity when you understand everything happening inside and around you. The state of integrity and harmony with the entire world becomes clear and obvious when everything surrounds you. Moreover, what was most important, the young shaman's heart was filled with HOPE and certainty that now he would surely find the right way! He produced some more sounds with his xomus. He suddenly began to distinctly feel that he was falling into an abyss, having absolutely no power to resist it. The next moment he dropped to the ground and passed into a deep slumber. When he woke up in the morning, it took him a while to understand what had happened. Then it began to dawn. The first rays of the rising sun flooded everything with soft pink light.

“What's happened to me?” asked Saosh, shaking off the drowsiness of the night.

“Ah! I guess I got lost. And then...” his face brightened.

“Now I remember! Ayami! Of course! She helped me. And another thing: ‘Without the spirits, I am nothing!’ That's what she taught me.” He took the xomus in his hands again and started playing. Soon he heard the cry of a bird nearby.

“That's where I should go, right?” Saosh asked hopefully. The bird cried again as if it were showing him the way.

“Good,” he said joyfully and went in the direction the spirits were showing. The bird had flown away, and he just walked in that direction for a while.

“Wow! I'm feeling so strong!” he thought. His body was indeed filled with incredible energy, which he could not explain. He felt as if he had not gone through that awful night when he had reached the most abysmal depths of

helplessness and despair. He was now full of youthful, lively and active power. He felt like he had grown wings on his feet and was HOVERING above the ground. Saosh was enjoying his journey. Having come to a river, he quenched his thirst, washed his face, sat on a stone and started playing the xomus to call the spirits for help. The wind immediately began to chime in the tree crowns higher up the river on his left.

"Thank you, spirits, for helping me," said Saosh and went on his way. He had been walking for several hours when he came to a picturesque valley, girdled about with the girth of unscalable snowy mountain peaks. At that very moment, he felt the Power that had been driving him the whole time vanish. Now he had difficulty telling me where to go next. Before he spread the picturesque mountain valley, blanketed with yellow leaves, which made a surprisingly good match with the distant white peaks and the crystal-blue sky.

"WITHOUT THE SPIRITS, YOU'RE NOTHING?" he suddenly heard a painfully familiar voice behind his back.

"Kuday, Kam! Is that you?" the young man jumped with joy.

"But how did you know?" "I haven't just learned this now, my boy. I know everything that has happened to you. How are you?"

"Good! Very good!" Saosh Yant still could not calm down.

"Good?" Kuday Kam gave an ironic look at the ragged clothes and the bare knee that was shining through the torn pants.

"Oh, this? I fell," Embarrassed, Saosh Yant covered the knee. But the next instant, his bare elbow showed treacherously through the torn sleeve.

"HA-HA-HA!" the Great Shaman broke into merry a laugh, showing his healthy teeth.

How much vigour and goodness there was in that laughter! It was the laughter of a truly happy man. Integral, joyous, powerful and great!

"All right, let's go into my chaadyr. You would do well to change your clothes...." That was the first real meeting of Saosh Yant and his Teacher, the Great Shaman Kuday Kam.

The Breath of Erlik

The young shaman understood that he was to go on another journey with his mentor. As always, the destination was unknown. All that he knew was that when the snow melted, he would leave. But to where?

Uncertain of what to do, Saosh Yant sat on the stump of a huge oak tree and began playing his jew's harp. There was a full moon overhead. The cold silver moon had risen above the mountains, observing the country with itssad and magical gaze. It was admonishing him, "Go, go, Saosh Yant! He is waiting for you! It is time!" Saosh had abandoned himself to

playing the jew's harp, forgetting everything. Kudai Kam had once told him, "Everything you do, my friend, you should do with total dedication. Then you will succeed. Or don't do it at all! Don't waste your time." Saosh had remembered these words throughout his life. And he now absorbed himself in the playing of the jew's harp with every fibre of his being. For the jew's harp, was summoning the helper spirits. They soon came to him and began to show him the way. Then, without hesitation, he took his things (that he had prepared beforehand) and left. His parents just watched sympathetically as he departed.

"He is going to Him," his mother whispered with reverent awe.

"Let him go," the father nodded. "This is his path. We shouldn't hinder him."

"He could at least say goodbye," the woman sighed.

"He'll come back. Stop worrying, Mother. Let's go to sleep."

They returned to the house as Saosh followed the path the spirits showed him.

He was walking through the taiga in the Altai Mountains. At the times when he would begin to stray from the path, the spirits would give him a sign: A hawk suddenly flew by with a shriek, firmly holding its prey in the claws. Next, an owl flew past quietly. It was so close that Saosh had time to see its light-coloured and fluffy belly. Now a roe deer leapt out and ran past him, then a deer showed its back, or a sudden gust of wind blew, wailing in the bare tree-tops – it was signifying that he had to go in a certain way. In this manner, little by little, sign after sign, Saosh came to the Chulyshman River Valley.

Steep and unscalable cliffs surrounded the bed of this proud and unfriendly river. Down the stream was Lake Teletskoe. Since ancient times it had been believed to be the realm of the God Erlik, Lord of the other world. It was considered that at its bottom lived Erlik Khan himself. And every year, he took no less than ten people, or even more, to satiate his gluttonous appetite. Rumour had it that the divers who had reached the bottom of Lake Teletskoe always returned white-haired. They could not speak for a long time afterwards or answer any questions. This gave the impression that they had met face to face with Erlik himself. When they recovered, they said that they had seen dead, undecayed bodies at the bottom of the lake that must have been there for centuries. They were pale blue and horribly bloated, having been disfigured by time. Bacteria and fish could not survive in such cold depths. So there was nothing to eat these bodies. The external beauty of the lake was enveloped by this relentless, mysterious and even sinister glory. The Chulyshman Gorge had a similar nature. There was an aura of cold and ruthlessness about this area.

Saosh was going toward the river's headwaters. Finally, after two days' journey, he came to the Katu-Yaryk pass, which could be translated as "ravine" or "gorge". The man-made road from the bottom of the gorge to the top looked like a serpentine band that stretched out on a relatively smooth slope. It wasn't smooth in every sense of the word, in any case. Having appeared at the end of the last century, it had made life easier for many of the locals. Unfortunately, it had also taken the lives of many others.

Having now come close to the Katu-Yaryk pass, Saosh noticed the smashed frame of a car at the bottom of the slope, a reminder of the precarious nature of the pass.

"What has happened here?" Saosh thought with caution.

He closed his eyes, tuning in, and then turned his head toward the car. In the next instant, a picture emerged in his mind. A small, dilapidated Zhiguli is going down the winding mountain pass. It is crammed full of all sorts of things. Packs, sacks, suitcases, boxes, bundles, baskets... there is hardly room for the people in all this junk. There is even a goat in there! It keeps bleating plaintively, but nobody is paying any attention to it. Little by little, the Zhiguli crawls down the bending slopes toward its goal. The people are quiet. The driver is feeling very nervous but shows no sign of this. Only his clenched jaw reveals his true state. In the backseat, a tense silence hangs in the air if there is enough space left to call it a seat.

A peculiar smell appears when they get to the middle of the pass—the smell that one can never forget or mistake for anything else. An experienced driver knows at once that it's the smell of overheated brakes. In the next instant, the brakes fail, the car races along the road, and, the car flies over the precipice at the nearest bend. Then, after a short drop, it starts rolling over and over all the way to the bottom of the gorge...

"Well," thought Saosh, "Mountains don't forgive mistakes or carelessness. And there must have been signs that these people could have noticed—something that seemed off, a sinking feeling in the stomach, perhaps. One should always listen to this feeling. These people ignored it. They shook it out of their heads and said to themselves – "It's okay, things will work out! We will be lucky." And this is the result. So I will learn from this example. I will listen to what my instincts prompt me to do, paying more attention to the signs that appear around me. The signs that are given by the spirits!"

"Peace be with you, my brothers! May you rest in peace! May the Gods be with you!"

With these words, Saosh bowed to the ground then stood silent for a while, watching the twisted car frame. Then he turned and began to climb the narrow road leading up to the mountain.

Katu-Yaryk

The winding road, which looked very much like a lightning flash in a stormy sky, led him higher and higher. As he climbed, Saosh recalled the first time he had seen this place as a child, when this road hadn't existed. There had only been a very narrow and steep horse way, which his grandfather had taken him along from the village of Ulagan to Lake Teletskoe.

As a three-year-old, he remembered sitting on the wide and powerful back of the horse, with his grandpa seated behind him, and staring in wonder at the beauty all around him. It seemed both magical and harsh at the same time. The sublime mountains, with the white-crested waterfalls that streamed down their slopes. The clouds that hovered high in the summer sky and then drug like shaggy beards over the frozen landscape in the winter. The majestic and impassable floodplain of the Chulyshman River. And then Lake Teletskoe itself. The lake stretched like an immense frozen mirror between the steep cliffs. It seemed so stern, magnificent and even a little frightening to him. He wasn't afraid, though. He had his worldly and knowledgeable guardian – his grandfather with him. And Saosh knew that everything would be fine. That the powerful and severe beauty of these places would be favourable to them. It had always been so.

Ever since he was a child, he'd felt the guidance of some tremendous and powerful Force, the meaning of which was unknown to him. He felt it constantly. It seemed to be protecting him throughout his life. This absolute certainty (knowledge) of what to do had never let him down. And he was very grateful for this.

Other people had not been as fortunate on the horse way. A lot of foolhardy young fellows had wound up dead. Many good men had been taken by Erlik Khan. Youthful, handsome, strong. And it had seemed that this would always be so until the two bulldozers had come and laid the smooth winding road on which our hero was now ascending. With every turn and curve, he rose higher and higher, admiring the rugged landscape.

It did not seem so magical now, despite the incredible beauty. The magnificent, white-bearded waterfall that streamed down from the steep cliff. And a bit further up the river, he could see the snowy peaks of the unscalable and eternal mountains.

"Ah, Altai, my Altai!" Saosh sighed delightedly as he perused the surroundings. "How great you are, how majestic and beautiful! My country! My whole life is with you. I am forever connected to you. "

Having filled himself with the surrounding beauty, he continued up the slope. Having reached the middle, he paused to catch his breath and saw the twisted wreckage of another car – it looked like a Moskvitch.

A thought flitted through his mind "What is this?" Instead of an answer,

a picture flashed like lightning in his mind's eye, as it had done before. The Moskvitch, loaded up with people, rugs, provisions for an entire month, carefully bundled clothes, and even a couple of geese and a chicken, is heading down the slope. Driving at this time of year is sheer madness. The driver, apparently, is relying on pure luck. He is constantly pumping the brakes a little, and the Moskvitch, slowly but steadily, is crawling down the slope. At first, everything goes well. And again, towards the middle, the brake fluid begins to boil, the brake shoes overheat, and the car starts rushing downwards uncontrollably. Finally, the driver sharply turns the wheel away from the precipice as the car runs over a protruding rock, loses its balance, and overturns.

"Thank God everyone survived," he exclaims with relief, recalling the image of the Zhiguli, and continues on.

The Beauty of the Gorge. The Obos

Ascending curve after curve up the rough serpentine road, he has time to admire the beauty of this magnificent place. He stops at a bend in the road to take a short rest and catch his breath. Wiping off the sweat that blurs his eyes, he listens to his heart that seems ready to burst out of his chest. "THUMP-THUMP! THUMP-THUMP! AL-TAI!.. AL-TAI!.. TICK- TACK!.. AL-TAI!.."

Saosh glanced down and saw the majestic gorge, its steep, dark grey walls that continued on endlessly. The gurgling waterfalls that stream down from them. The bed of the tumultuous river sending its turbulent waters toward Lake Teletskoe. He next casts his eyes to the stern and tranquil mountains, standing against the dazzling blue of the sky, where a lonely hawk is circling.

"There is my Altai!" he thought proudly. "Only in such places can the forces of nature and man's audacity meet face to face. You begin to understand the complete power and beauty of the Creator. There are so many places like this in my country!"

Having feasted his eyes upon the beautiful view and regained his strength, he continued the ascent. Finally, Saosh reached the top of the gorge to an observation site with many obos – heaps of stones placed one on top of the other. Stopping at one of them, he thought:

"People today don't understand what these pyramids mean. They make a wish, take the first stone they see, put it into the pile, and think that it will bring them closer to fulfilling their desires. Forgetting that they are taking the easiest way and making no efforts at all. In the past, people used to bring these stones with them. There were sacred texts and prayers carved in

them. Some of them would weigh ten kilograms or more. Before going to the holy places, the pilgrims spent a lot of time preparing and inscribing these texts with their hands. They kept a fast and prayed, collecting subtle energy. And when they arrived, having overcome the fatigue and exhaustion, strained to the limit, they found their courage and reached these holy places, feeling so strong and powerful. In this way, their wishes quickly reached the Gods. And the Gods granted these wishes. Things are different now. A man thinks that if he gets into a car and goes to the place in relative comfort, taking the first stone that he likes (the lovelier, the better) and putting it into the pile of stones, he will achieve his goal. But the Gods can't hear him. His energetic state doesn't equal the level of his wish. It is nothing but the weak and chaotic impulse of a relaxed man who lives in the conveniences and comfort of a sick society.

NO, THANK YOU! I will never be like this! I don't want the Gods to ignore my prayers. I want to become a Great Kam. And I am ready to do the impossible, that which is beyond my powers. But, I know and understand that it's the only way for me to gain the powers of a shaman!"

He stood at the observation site a bit longer, deep in thought, admiring the beauty of the gorge that stretched below. One more day of hiking the steadily ascending road, he would reach the place shown to him by the spirits. Kudai Kam's dwelling.

The Meeting. The Shaman's Dwelling

Close to a beautiful mountain lake, whose boundless waters reflected the blue sky and the majestic mountain peaks, lay a chaadyr that looked like a small six-sided pyramid. It was made from the trunks of young larches and supported by a central pole in the middle of the structure. The pole symbolized the basis of the universe. The chaadyr was covered with huge pieces of tree bark, and deer hides with the fur turned inwards. "You won't get frozen in such a home, that is for sure," thought Saosh. "It'll be warm here in all weather. How very wisely our ancestors built homes!" The chaadyr had a hole at the top, through which thin smoke curled like a snake.

"The master must be at home," Saosh thought with relief and wiped off the sweat from his forehead. "It means I've come at the right time. Then, not trusting his eyes, he walked up to the dwelling and touched the hide, which was velvety and pleasant to the touch.

"At last, I've come!" thought our hero, and at that very moment, the curtain of the tent rose, and Kudai Kam himself came out. His hair and beard were frost white. But his face, furrowed with precise, smooth lines, was very lively and energetic. At first glance, it was rather hard to determine his age.

You would think that he was about a hundred years old. But his motions and gestures were active and brisk, like a youngster's. And the gaze!.. The gaze!.. Penetrating. Firm. It literally saw through you, like an X-ray. And at the same time very friendly, understanding and wise. Saosh was always at a loss for words before this powerful gaze, never knowing how to behave.

Today Kudai Kam was wearing a light fur robe and home shoes.

"You're back?" he said, cordially welcoming Saosh with his amazing and sincere smile.

Saosh looked in his keen black eyes:

"I am," he breathed out. "Come in then."

Kudai Kam amiably raised the curtain.

"You should come in now, as I need to go away for a while."

When Saosh was inside the chaadyr, he felt as if he'd entered another world. In the middle, a fire was burning in the hearth, bordered with smoothstones. The flame was tenderly licking the cauldron, where a fragrant tea was simmering.

The smoke from the hearth was curling upward, gently passing the canvas sheet where the shaman had put herbs, roots and jerked meat to dry, heading up to Eternity through the hole at the top of the dwelling.

"Well, well," thought Saosh, "how precisely the structure's been designed! All the air goes up. No smoke, no soot. Only comfort and warmth."

He looked around the dwelling and once again marvelled at how wisely and harmoniously everything had been arranged. The entrance faced the east as a symbol that everything comes from Eternity. From the realm of the wise, sublime and distant God Tengri. On the south-eastern side, there hung a horse's harness.

"As if it was just brought to us from Tengri Khan's endless expanse and now rests here," thought Saosh. "It's likely to be telling us that the journey back is a long distance. So stay here, dear guests, and appreciate the hospitality!" On the southern, masculine side, as well as on the ground of the south-western side, there were chests filled with many different items. Above them, on the shelves, were trinket boxes. This part is ruled by the cheerful, creative and friendly Ülgen.

A daring thought flashed through Saosh's head, "I'd really like to look inside. There must be lots of various magical objects amassed there! And each can do something unique to help its owner."

And instantly, gave himself a slap on the wrist, "Stop that! What a shame! These are sacred items of great power. They are not just 'things'. They are what helps a shaman. When your season comes, you'll be shown everything you need. In the meantime, keep quiet and wait patiently!"

He continued looking the tent over and saw a real shaman's iconostasis in

the front corner of the south-western side. On it was mandalas which symbolically described the entire world. Saosh made a low obeisance to them.

"These are the shaman's icons!" he thought reverently. "I have heard of them many times, but it's the first time I see them with my own eyes! The whole world, the entire Universe, is shown in these pictures!"

His eyes fell next to the gun that stood not far from the icons. "As if it defends the sacred place from uninvited guests and evil spirits," he mused. "I should be more careful here."

He shifted his gaze to the western side and saw a bed covered with a bearskin – the place of honour occupied by the master of the house.

"The western part of the dwelling, governed by the talkative, caring and benevolent Umai," he thought. "The world of the present. Here, I have heard, is the place of honour for the master of the house. One can have a good rest and regain strength. Here new children are conceived too. It makes sense because Umai is a symbol of fertility. It would be interesting to know how many children Kudai Kam has fathered. He's never told me about that!"

He immediately became ashamed of himself. "Quit that! What a shame!" he rebuked himself.

"And what's so wrong with this? Every man has got children," he thought in the next moment. "There's nothing wrong with this question. Anyway, is Kudai Kam impotent or not?"

"No, stop it! Don't stick your nose in this business""How is he with women, I wonder?"

The two parts were struggling inside of him: one awfully curious and the other modest and shy.

This continued until his eyes fell on the northern and north-eastern part of the tent, the feminine side of the dwelling. The place which was ruled by Erlik. Saosh saw dishes on the shelves, cooking pots and other housewares.

"It is quite symbolic," he thought, "because Erlik is the memories of the past. Women mainly live on their memories and the knowledge they have already acquired. And in our world, it is Erlik who is in charge of memories. All the events and phenomena of life go to him. So our memory and everything that is connected with us will go away as well. All of our dreams, hopes, and aspirations. I will go there as well someday...."

He shook off these distressing thoughts and looked again at the tableware.

"On the other hand, without all this, we just couldn't live," he went on.

"Without memories, there are no roots. And without roots, our tree would collapse. The world of the past is necessary. If everything that is born and is created in this world would never move on, the world would be

overflowing!"

He laughed, imagining so many objects, people, and animals crammed together in such crowded conditions as people jammed together in an elevator where no one can move.

"Like in an overcrowded subway train on the weekend," he chuckled. 'Let me through! This is my stop!' – 'Hey, you're tearing off my pocket and my arm with it!' – 'But let me through, okay?' – 'Ouch!' – 'Get out of my way!' – 'Imbecile!' – 'You're an imbecile!' – 'You moron!' – 'Go to hell!'... This is how we'd live in the world if it weren't for Erlik!"

He thought a little more, and then another funny picture leapt into his mind: the severely cramped conditions cause everything to grow together. Such close contact makes their surfaces "meld", and the substances blend. So, as a result, there is one useless, colourless jumble, and whatever comes to this world, from the future, from Ülgen, inevitably gets plastered into this mess.

"Ugh!" he shook himself like a dog shakes off water. "No! It's a mercy we have, Erlik! Cleanser of this world! Powerful and wise."

He glanced around the dwelling, and thought, "This dwelling is so harmoniously organized! Each thing is near at hand, in its place. The old-established order, has never been disturbed. Everything has been reasonably planned. How far people live today from this harmony! This dwelling is also very convenient: it can be disassembled and transported at a moment's notice. You are not tied to any place. You can easily move wherever you like. And the modern man? He gives up his WHOLE LIFE, saving for one apartment, and trying to pay off the predatory mortgage loan. After this, he is uncertain of what may happen in the world or his country. He could be thrown out on the streets by his relatives. Or worse yet, his own children might take possession after starving him to death or locking him up in a nuthouse. There might be wars, disasters or floods. Anything can go wrong. And the man lived his whole life in a stifling, infernal city. And for what? To earn money for a single cell in a huge beehive? He has never seen a sunrise, heard the murmur of a brook, or smelled the fresh scent of grass. He has lived the life of an office zombie or a dutiful workaholic, and what does he have to show for it? Only senility, illnesses, infirmity and death. NO! Our ancestors lived much better lives. They were much more clever than we are!"

His thoughts were interrupted by Kudai Kam's voice: "Have you looked around?" he asked with feeling.

"Yes, a little," Saosh answered, startled a bit. "You've let me inside for the first time."

"The time has come," said Kudai Kam, looking at the young man again with piercing eyes, making Saosh feel uneasy. "You're tired from your trip. Sit

down by the fire. Have some food. And in the evening, we'll prepare the sweat lodge." "All right", Saosh agreed.

The Earthquake

Saosh took off his outerwear with pleasure and seated himself on the trestle bed by the hearth.

"Tell me, dear Kudai Kam," he asked politely. "How is it that the fire is set right in the middle of the chaadyr, but there's no smoke. And you have no stove or air extraction. Their place should be filled with smoke. But it all goes up through the centre opening. How is this possible?"

"Ha-ha!" the Great Shaman smiled. "My dwelling has been designed and built based on ancient laws. And oriented specially so that all the smoke rises. It is important to place the chaadyr properly."

"How so?"

"I mean that if you do it just a bit wrong, it won't work properly. And you'll have to put up the chaadyr again. It is important to know how to do it correctly."

"Will you teach me?"

"Yes, when the time comes...."

Kudai Kam fell silent, his look plainly telling the apprentice that he was thinking about something else.

Saosh became thoughtful for a while. There was an awkward silence. He felt an uneasiness in the pit of his stomach, like a cat scratching him. His eyes began to wander around the chaadyr. He looked up and saw the large awning above the hearth.

"What is it?" the young man wondered out loud. "What is it for?" "It's an awning. I dry things here."

"Dry what?" "Everything."

"What exactly, Kudai Kam?"

"All kinds of things. Herbs. Berries. Mushrooms. Meat." "A-a-a-h!"

"You wish to be dried yourself?"

"Oh, no, please, maybe later. Not now," Saosh mumbled guiltily.

Kudai Kam now looked purposely and firmly into his apprentice's eyes as if throwing into his soul a burning mace in one precise and accurate motion. Saosh gave a start and immediately understood his mistake: he shouldn't have been bothering Kudai Kam with his detailed questions. The Power lies in the quiet and silence. When your season comes, you'll be told everything. For now, accumulate the energy and don't twaddle. Be attentive and accurate. Saosh guiltily sat down on the trestle bed, his head low. Kudai Kam took the lid off the cauldron and threw a big handful of herbs into it. The awkward fussiness that had been clutching the young man's soul like a

sharp-clawed paw finally abated and changed into tranquil silence. As if an infuriated cat had retracted its claws and once again become a fluffy kitten. They sat in the chaadyr drinking herbal tea and enjoying the pleasant evening. The steam that rose from the big cauldron was spreading the fragrance of the meadows and fields, the remnants of last summer. Saosh was reclining on the trestle bed, enjoying the pleasant tiredness after the journey. He was relaxed, but at the same time, he seemed to be waiting for what his master would say next. For some reason, the shaman was silent, as if waiting for something. But what? Saosh could not understand. And he felt uncomfortable, and he didn't want to be the first to break the silence. So he quietly watched the flames of the fire flicker.

Before his mind could start thinking again, he felt a sudden and strong vibration in the ground. The dishes on the small table in front of the hearth, as well as the cauldron and the chaadyr, started shaking.

"What is it?" Saosh gave Kudai Kam a questioning look.

Kudai Kam was sitting on his bed, completely relaxed, as if nothing had happened. In the meantime, the vibration had stopped. Everything was calm again.

"Must've been my imagination," the young man thought, shrugging his shoulders. And as he lifted his tea to take a sip, the ground shook again, and the relaxed mood left him completely. He dropped the cup out of his hands, horrified, jumped up and began rushing around the chaadyr. An animal-like fear seized the whole of his being. He was running for his life! He glanced at the Great Shaman and saw that he wasn't reacting at all.

"Kudai Kam! We must do something!" he shouted. "Why are you being so calm? Why are you sitting? We must run. Let's go...."

He didn't have time to finish the sentence before the ground shook again so violently that chaadyr swayed, and all the utensils jumped. The horse harness clanked, the gun fell down, and the leaves, herbs, mushrooms, flowers, slices of jerked meat and bundles of roots went flying. It looked as if the chaadyr was going to collapse and bury its inhabitants.

Like a wounded wild animal, Saosh started running even more frantically than before, turning everything upside down. An animal-like fear swept over him. Unaware of what he was doing, he dashed towards the exit. All of a sudden, a shrill lashing sound pierced the air. Something whistled by his ear and then twisted around his ankles. There was a powerful yank, followed by a sweeping motion, and the unfortunate runaway found himself on the ground.

"Help me! Let me go! Help!" he yelled with all his might.

"Why so much shouting?" Kudai Kam grinned with perfect calm. "Since no one can hear you here anyway."

"Saosh shrank down to the floor, frightened, like a helpless little kitten."

"Going far?"

"I!.. I!.. I!.." he spluttered, rolling on the floor.

Kudai Kam came up to Saosh leisurely, casting a tranquil and piercing look into his eyes, which made Saosh feel a pleasing and velvety calm spread throughout his body.

"Ah? What am I doing, really?" the young man muttered, coming to his senses.

Seeing that his apprentice was okay, the shaman began to untie the lasso from his feet.

"What was it, an earthquake?" Saosh asked, returning to his trestle bed.

Do Not Disturb the Ghost Of The Princess

"Yes," answered Kudai Kam. "It is not the first one, as you know, since the ghost of the Altai Princess was disturbed."

"That's right!"

"As soon as those silly scientists excavated her burial site and took her body to their institute, calamities and cataclysms have begun. There were earthquakes across the Altai. Many families were left homeless, without a roof over their heads. This foolishness has caused people great devastation and disasters. And it's not over. The scientists keep meddling with nature. Poor fellows!"

"Why is that, Kudai Kam?"

"Because people don't understand that they should show respect for all the things that are around them. Even for a tree, a stone or an animal. Even for a tiny blade of grass, not to mention the tomb of the Princess. It was created for a reason, you see. The Princess protects our Altai against all misfortunes and disasters. The scientists don't understand that these calamities are the result of their barbaric attitude to the world. They don't understand that if they displease the spirits, they may receive severe punishment. They think life to be lifeless. They watch the world through a microscope as if it were a big test tube. They see life as a subject of their experiments, a field of research, and nothing more. They are ignorant people who have severely limited themselves with their perceptions of the world. They are to be pitied, of course. And so is the nature that they experiment on. Men imagine themselves to be the dominators of nature. And they think that they may do whatever they like. Men interfere in the natural balance of things, disrupting it. So nature responds to everything that they do to it."

"Yes, you can see this from what has happened lately," the young man sighed sadly. "They planned to build a hydro plant on the Katun but didn't expect it to upset the balance. First, mosquitoes would appear in large numbers,

and the air humidity would change. Then the river would no longer be as clean and pure as before."

"You're right, my friend. But look around you – everything is filled with life, intelligence and light."

"And the Princess as well?"

"Sure!" the shaman smiled. "And I'll tell you more. She is alive." "How is that, Kudai Kam?" Saosh marvelled.

"Well, of course, not physically, as we usually perceive life." "Then how?"

"She lives in the shadow world." "In the realm of Erlik?"

"Exactly. And you can meet her there." "What for?"

"She is willing to impart knowledge to you."

"So, how do I do that?" Saosh asked, burning with impatience.

"To communicate with the soul of a dead or living person, you must visualize them or think about them emotionally. In other words, you must not be indifferent to them. Your emotions, like a radar, send the person energy, and you receive it back enriched with the state that this person is in. You must feel this energy and understand this person's message."

"All shamans do this?"

"Yes, all of them. And you're a shaman too, and you can enter the spirit world and meet her in person."

"But how shall I tune in to her image? I've never seen the Princess!" persisted Saosh.

"It's all right, and I'll help you. For I've seen her." "HOW?!!! WHERE?"

"In the shadow world, of course," Kudai Kam grinned at the young man's confusion.

"Is she beautiful?" Saosh asked curiously? "Very beautiful."

"Then I'm ready," he answered, burning with enthusiasm.

"Easy, easy, hold your horses! The Princess should be regarded with reverence and respect. Or she might get angry with you."

"I'm sorry, Kudai Kam, I didn't mean to say that."

"My job is to warn you. Now, take your drum, start the ritual, and feel the beat that will carry you away into the spirit world. Find it and tune in to what you want to see. I will tune in to the image of the Princess, playing the jew's harp to help you with your ritual."

Saosh Meets The Princess

It took Saosh a long time to choose a new beat and tune in. He twirled round hither – it wasn't any good. Then he twirled round thither – it wasn't any better! He changed the vibrational frequency – it didn't help! He didn't know how much time had passed –. Only the pillar of smoke from

the fire had become more regular and steady.

"The sun must've gone down," thought Saosh, "it's become cooler, and the insatiable cold guarding the hole at the top of the tent is now more frantically and greedily attracting the heat from the hearth. It must already be night outside."

Saosh was thinking this way, falling into a deeper trance to the vibrant and resounding beat of the drum.

Something started whirling around the drum – the spirit of the drum, the deer Tyn Bura, whose skin had been used to make it. The spirit came out from the drum and stood before Saosh, beautiful, its magnificent antlers spread wide and its head proudly raised. It cast a silent look with its intense and penetrating eyes into the young man's eyes as if asking him to follow. Saosh took a few hesitant steps and understood at once that he was flying after his deer, which was carrying him along to the shadow world. He felt as light and free as the smoke that curled away from the fire, and he flew out of the hole at the top of the chaadyr. He saw the distant cloudless sky, with stars that spread like a blanket of velvet in the boundless space. The Milky Way stretched as far as the eye could see. The myriads of stars that stared down at the earth from the sky, with their penetrating eyes, became one endless, eternal glow.

"Wow! How beautiful!" Saosh shuddered with delight. "I wish I could go there!"

He now flew in a flash of light and appeared next to a beautiful and majestic woman.

"Who is she?" a question flitted through his mind.

And at the same time, he KNEW that the Altai Princess herself was standing before him.

"Can it be true?!" a thought flew through his mind like the wind. "It's HER!" Saosh looked into her unfathomable eyes and felt that he was literally drowning in her piercing, unwinking stare.

"What a beauty!" he thought with awe. The next instant, a daring idea struck him:

"I would love to have a girlfriend like this!" He blushed with shame at once.

"Stop it! What a shame!" he rebuked himself. "Have you forgotten WHO is standing before you? Aren't you afraid to think that? Eh?!"

The Princess looked at him in silence, and she must have heard his thoughts. Yes, surely she did hear him. Only these thoughts didn't bother her at all. She seemed to be hovering, majestically above all this worldly vanity and passions. Her gaze was both bewitching and sobering at the same time.

Saosh drew in a deep breath, and then breathing out, he sort of shrank back. This helped to steady him. The next moment, his eyes wandered over the Princess's costume. Her head was adorned with a very high and long

headdress. Behind the head was a crescent, placed horizontally and decorated with turquoise pendants. It symbolised the eternal feminine and of beauty, of the limitless feminine lunar energy. Her two tight braids were twirled in spirals on the sides of her head.

"She must have been married," Saosh thought. "It's our custom: girls wear one braid on the back of the head. And once a woman gets married, after the wedding night, she starts wearing two braids. Who was her husband, I wonder?"

In the next instant, the young man gave himself a scolding:

"Quit it! Shame on you! What difference does it make who her husband was? What do you care? It wasn't you – so chuck it!"

Saosh stood in perplexity for a short while. And then that part of his mind was up to its old games again.

"But I wonder still if she is WHAT she is, then WHAT was her husband like? He was likely to be as handsome, strong and powerful as her... I wish I could be at her side instead of him just for a day!"

The other part of him now cut in again:

"Oh, shut up, will you? Look at yourself! What a sight you are! You think you're a match for her?! That's ridiculous!"

The two opposite parts of his personality were struggling inside of him. If Saosh had been saying all this aloud, he would have appeared a madman. And he was going mad indeed. The beauty, might and grandeur that radiated from this wonderful woman drove him crazy. His eyes began to wander involuntarily down her attire, studying even the smallest detail of it.

She wore a long grey kaftan embroidered in a fanciful national pattern along the hem, sleeves and collar. The long, floor-length gray skirt was decorated similarly. Under the kaftan, one could see long dazzling white sleeves that symbolized the purity and chastity of the Princess's thoughts. Her wrists were adorned with bracelets, her fingers with gold rings – everything was a perfect match. Everything created a beautiful, majestic and feminine look.

"How old is she?" Saosh thought again. "She looks very young. Not more than nineteen. But she is very strong in spirit for her age. She can well be thirty. And the gaze! My God!"

As he thought this, she cast a careful, penetrating and magical look at him, and he felt as if he'd received an electric shock. Hypnotized, he was standing and watching her, unable to move or utter a word. She held out her hand, and a string of turquoise prayer beads appeared. They emanated such dazzling light that our hero had to squint to see.

"No, no, it's not right!" a thought flitted through his mind. "Come on, do what she asks you to do!"

Bowing respectfully before the Princess, Saosh took the gift with two

hands.

"That's better," the Princess said condescendingly. "And what should I do with these?" he asked dubiously.

The Gods' Beads

"I will teach you how to pray with the aid of the four winds and enable the vision of the Gods," she said majestically. "Sit down facing the east and take the beads in your left hand, at the level of your chest."

Saosh turned and sat facing the rising sun. It had just climbed out of its night cradle and began tinting the surroundings with shades of soft pink and purple. A few of its rays fell upon the beads and lit up the beautiful soft turquoise. The young man was astonished and nearly dropped them out of his hands.

"Hold them firmly," the Princess smiled indulgently, "and invoke Tengri, the God of Eternity, by counting the beads to the beat of your heart. Start uttering the sound 'Grinnn', move the beads, starting with the first one, in a counterclockwise movement so that they move towards you. Use your thumb and forefinger. Take one bead for each sound. Feel Tengri Khan's blessing flow into your heart." Saosh stood still and silent. He breathed in and out, then listened to the beating of his heart.

Suddenly, in his mind, there was such a silence, as if he had just heard and begun to realize all that was happening around and inside himself for the first time in his life. He started counting his beads to the beat of his heart.

"Grinnn! Grinnn! Grinnn!" And at once, a perfect ringing silence settled in the space around him, and there was great and eternal peace. The starry sky spread over him. Its fathomless, dark velvet canopy stretched above his head, enchanting him with its peculiar mystery and the anticipation of something new and inconceivable simultaneously. The entire dome of the sky glittered with myriads of crystal clear and amazingly bright stars. They seemed to be talking to him in a language they could only understand. The endless inexpressible mystery was inviting and magnetic. The starlight began to flow into the whole of his being through the top of the young man's head. Then it filled his heart. He started, and began to tremble like delicate feather grass in the breeze.

He had never experienced anything like that. He felt that he was truly alive for the first time in his life. Overflowing with energy, an exclamation escaped Saosh, "I love you, Lord, and all of Your creations!" And instantly, all the stars burst forth with a magical, heavenly light. Their glow blended and became one. Saosh had to squint again because of the incredible radiance. Then it began to grow dim. And when Saosh opened his eyes again, he saw in each of the stars the eyes of the God Tengri. Each of the eyes seemed to be watching him from Eternity, calling him. Then this glow

became faint, more quiet, uniform and soft. And suddenly, the astonished young man saw Tengri Khan himself sitting against the canopy of the sky. Majestic, calm and handsome, he was looking at him with all the myriads of his eyes. Clad in a high headdress and blue national costume, he had eyes on his hands, feet and eyebrows. And the entire canopy was scattered with the infinite number of eyes that were looking from Eternity. Saosh made a low obeisance to him. Tengri held out his hand over him, and in the next moment, the prayer beads lit up with a dazzling bright turquoise light and vanished into nothing. Saosh straightened his back and again saw the Princess standing before him.

"Now turn to the south," she said majestically. Saosh turned around ninety degrees and sat up straight. "Take these," said the Princess as she handed him yellow beads. He accepted them with awe. In the next instant, the beads in his hands lit up with an amber glow, as bright as the sun. He was surprised and unable to adjust to it. He now turned to the Princess. "Finger them in the same way," she said, "but this time with your thumb and middle finger. Move one bead for each beat of your heart. Count the beads saying "Gannn" and invoking Ülgen, the God of the Future. Hold them at the level of your waist. Saosh acted accordingly. Listening to his heartbeat, he began to count his beads.

"Gannn! Gannn! Gannn!" the sunny beads began to twirl. He felt his solar plexus kind of broaden, and then dawn appeared before his eyes. The sun was rising, turning everything gold and burning away the night shadows and the hoary shreds of the fog. Lighting the feathery clouds with its first gentle rays, it tinted them with the most extravagant tinges of pink, golden and lilac. Saosh went on counting the prayer beads. Gannn! Gannn! Gannn! A soft, warm breeze was blowing into his face, bringing the scent of flowers and freshly cut grass. The freshly awakened birds cheerfully flitted and chirped in the sky. Beneath him, a beautiful pure mountain stream flowed towards him, as if bringing all the things he could wish for from the future. Any thought, even the most daring dreams, could come true at this moment if he just wished for it to happen. Everything was ahead of him. He felt a great prospect had opened before him, filled with the anticipation of something new, lively, light and joyous. He caught a glimpse of Ülgen's benevolent face in the feathery clouds. There was something in Ülgen that reminded one of the round and kind-hearted Grandfather Frost from a Russian folk tale. Or Santa Claus from the western stories. With a long white beard, a moustache and chubby red cheeks. Cunning and sparkling eyes. Slightly bald-headed. Three precise and smooth horizontal lines furrowed his well-rounded forehead. He was dressed in a traditional white kaftan, trimmed with ermine on the collar, sleeves, and the front and lower edges. Lord Ülgen held a staff in his left hand – a symbol of the future, from which all the things, events, people and phenomena come to us. Watching

him, Saosh felt some unusual new inspiration fill him. He was ablaze with unspeakable enthusiasm. He wanted to create, play, sing, dance, and make great scientific discoveries. To do something for the good and joy of all men on earth, to make everyone on our planet feel wonderful!

"Thank you, Ulgen Khan," said Saosh with respect, making a low bow to him and touching the ground with his head and hands. After a while, the beautiful vision vanished as quickly as it had appeared. The prayer beads in the young man's hands lit up in a dazzling yellow light and disappeared as well. He realized he was sitting before the Altai Princess again.

"Now turn to the west," she said, giving him red beads. Saosh took them and couldn't take his eyes off the first bead. It was the biggest of three beads, followed by a medium-sized one, and then the smallest.

"These are the masculine and feminine parts of the deity," explained the Princess, seeing his silent question and amazement, "and the smallest one joins their spirit, their conscious, the Aiy. Always begin with this bead, for it is the most important one. Tune in to Umai, and, fingering the beads with your fourth finger and thumb, hold them at the bottom of the stomach, and say 'Khem'.

"Saosh did as he was told. Listening to the beating of his heart, he began to count the beads. "Khem! Khem! Khem!" sang his heart and his entire body. "Khem! Khem! Khem!" the purple in the beads began to glitter. Next, he saw a beautiful forest lake covered with a bluish mist, with lovely soft yellow water lilies blooming on its surface. The white heap of clouds were hanging in the blue sky, their vertical caps towering high into the air. The warm summer sun shone brightly, bringing joy and happiness to every living thing. The logs cracked in the fire burning in front of the young shaman. Its murmuring and insatiable flame rose as if wanting to fly away to the clouds. The trees blossomed and released their various fragrances that blended into an incredible palette; on many of them, the fruit had already grown, ripe and juicy, ready to drop to the ground. The wind was whirling playfully, stirring the tongues of the flames, swaying them to-and-fro; now calming down, then continuing with his mischievous tricks. The entire atmosphere was filled with joy, peace and merriment. Saosh felt some kind of protective and guarding aura around him. He felt like a child beside his loving mother, ready to protect, comfort and feed him. Like he had become a baby again and returned to the warm embrace of his affectionate mother. In the next instant, he caught a glimpse of Umai's form in the mist that floated over the lake. She appeared before him: young, rosy-cheeked and cheerful. She was dressed in a white national costume adorned with a red Altai ornamental pattern. Light, youthfulness and beauty radiated from her. The young man was looking at her and feeling a thrill of joy run through his entire body. It was that incomparable feeling a man has when he sees a very beautiful woman before him. Saosh

was captivated, fascinated, and absolutely crushed by her beauty, grace and the incredible light emanating from her youthful face. He began to peer at her features.

The head of the Goddess was crowned with a big tiara, richly decorated with diamonds and rubies.

"That's a truly regal ornament," he thought, "suitable only for a God. A plain woman just wouldn't look good in it! If I am to meet a girl in my life, I want her to be like this. To be no less than her. And I will surely give her such a tiara. Yes! That's the way it'll be!" the young shaman was dreaming. "Just like this one!!!" He gazed at the Goddess more intently. This time his eyes feasted themselves on her beautiful young face with strong oriental features. It radiated peace, beauty, quiet and harmony. Umai was smiling as if inviting him to join her in this feast of life, abundance and prosperity, which she herself eternally abode.

"That's what a wife must be like," Saosh kept on dreaming. "With her, one should feel easy, comfortable and happy. I would always return to such a woman after my exploits. And she would be proud of me. Yes! That's the wife I would want for myself!" Some incredible light emanated from Umai. Sitting against the full silver moon, she was the personification of the Orb of Night, the symbol of everlasting womanly beauty and charm. Her long silvery hair, cascading to the ground, radiated amazing light. Saosh took a closer look at her hair and just gasped with surprise: the hair seemed to be emitting a soft silver glow from within. It was ALIVE!

"What is this?" he thought, puzzled. In the next instant, he understood.

"But these are... these are... the Moon's rays! Yes! YES! It is not just hair, but THE RAYS OF THE MOON!" The Goddess's hair glowed with soft moonlight.

"Enough! I can't bear it any longer!" Saosh was losing his patience. "I'll marry her. Yes! Umai will be my wife! That's what I want, that's what I desire!" He was just drooling over the Goddess and went on looking hungrily at her. Umai sat on the thick green spring grass against the forest and the night sky which was adorned with plenty of stars and the full moon. She was holding a cup in her right hand – a symbol of abundance and prosperity, and a spruce twig, a symbol of the world of the present, where she reigned. Not far in front of her, there was a strip of fertile land, on which Saosh saw three "babies", so to speak.

They were a fawn – a symbol of luck and agility, a bear cub symbolizing strength and confidence, and a child lying on a sheepskin – the image of the human-to-be and his best qualities. A carpet of scarlet tulips blazed before the beautiful Goddess – a reminder of her blossoming and everlasting love and beauty. Behind her, not far away, animals were peacefully grazing, and a playful colt was prancing. To her left was a yurt with the curtain raised invitingly.

"Ah, I wish I could go inside and see what's in there. Enjoy peace and harmony. The love and care of a woman which gives strength and energy. The youthfulness and beauty!" He at once slapped himself on the wrist, "Don't! Don't dare to dream of such a thing! She is a Goddess! She might not like it...." But Umai wasn't showing any signs of resentment. She was just watching the young man as if smiling internally at him. He obeyed her lowly but did not want to leave this state. Suddenly the beads lit up with a scarlet light and then disappeared. Saosh straightened his back unwillingly and saw the Altai Princess again.

"Now turn to the north," said the Princess. "Take these black beads."

Saosh accepted them automatically, giving them a quick glance, and now he cried out in surprise, throwing them away from himself.

"A-a-ah!!! Damn!" he shrieked as if scalded. The Princess laughed cheerfully at his eccentric behavior. And now the prayer beads were again in her hands. He made an effort to pull himself together and took a good look at them. Each bead was carved with the image of a noseless skull, with a "nice" grin and empty eyeholes.

"Dear me!" he thought.

"Isn't that something?"

"Have no fear," the Altai Princess said, winking merrily at him.

"All of you who live on earth will become 'nice' and 'cute' just like these beads someday"

"Phew! I didn't expect that!" he gasped.

"Ha-ha-ha!" she laughed melodiously.

"What a charming laughter she has!"

And before he could think of anything else, he heard: "Take them in your right hand and this time fingers them with your thumb and pinky finger in a clockwise movement, away from yourself. As if pushing away all that is obsolete, burdensome and idle. All that you want to let go, to get rid of. Everything that you've decided to destroy and eliminate. Put your hand on your right knee and start saying 'Kennn,' invoking Erlik."

Saosh began to finger the beads as the skull beads started to twirl to the beat of his heart. The wheel of time twirled as well.

"Kennn! Kennn! Kennn!" He at once felt a breath of deathlike cold on his skin. The cold struck through him, chilling him to the marrow. Dreadful groans and indistinct lamentations were heard all around. An owl was hooting in the distance. Sinister black clouds covered the gloomy night sky with their shaggy, scraggly beards. And glancing furtively through the gaps between them, a lonely, sad, and always hungry moon shone down. The cold north wind was driving these clouds into complete darkness, away from Saosh. The young man looked down involuntarily and was stupefied with terror. In the breathtaking abyss underneath him lay a roaring stream that was sweeping away everything in its path. It flowed away

from him with a deafening crash, submerging huge rocks and boulders like so many grains of sand. Carrying away dead branches, leaves and rotted tree trunks. Taking everything obsolete, idle and old into the abyss of timelessness. All of the hopes, aspirations, dim expectations, sorrows and woes of people. Everything that had once given joy, pleasure and happiness was now broken. Together with the masses of dead leaves, rocks and rotted tree trunks, they were floating away in the power of time into the void. Into the vale of woe and despair. Saosh stared into the distant gloom and saw Erlik Khan's silhouette appear then quickly disappear. The young man could barely make out and "grasp" his features. Very thin, tall and swarthy. A long narrow face and burning, coal-black eyes, which gazed grimly outwards beneath the heavy black brows. He had a narrow, black forked beard, a long moustache that tucked up behind the ears, and sharp fangs protruding from his sinister grin. Clad in black attire, he was sitting backwards on a bull of dark color, riding in front of a ruined castle. An evil fire of human passions and unfulfilled desires was burning in its windows. Erlik Khan moved his right hand, and Saosh saw a snake in it. Like a whip, it soared upwards, producing a sharp crack almost to the young man's ear. With this urging, the bull quickened its pace and ran off. The last thing that he saw was a lasso in Erlik's left hand that he used to catch the souls of lost sinners, dragging them with him into the abyss. The vision disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. The roaring stopped, and everything became silent at once. In the next instant, the young shaman felt some burdensome and heavy load lifted off his heart. The years, filled with worry, fear and trouble, were over. And he felt easy and refreshed, as if reborn as if life had just begun.

"Thank you, Lord Erlik Khan," said Saosh reverently, making a bow to the ground. And before he knew it, he found himself in Kudai Kam's chaadyr. Astonished by what he had seen, he shook himself like a dog shaking off water, but he could not come to. "Phew! What was that?" he asked in amazement.

"Remember everything that you've seen. And recall these visions when you practice sorcery," said Kudai Kam.

"And the beads? Do I need to have such beads for each deity?" asked Saosh.

"Yes," answered Kudai Kam. "You'll have to make them yourself. I'll teach you how to do it."

"All right, whatever you say. And you, Kudai Kam, do you have beads like that?" wondered the young man.

"No, mine is different, my friend."

Out of a little bag on his waist, he took a thick string, which had a few round bone beads that looked like big buttons. They had an aura of strength, power and silence about them. The young shaman couldn't understand what they were made of. He involuntarily reached for them.

"It's too early for you to have beads like that," Kudai Kam said, taking away his hand. Saosh was a little embarrassed and fell silent.

"They're made of the skull bones of dead shamans. The skull bones store their powers."

"Wow! How about that!" Saosh even bit his lip with envy.

"Don't you worry," grinned Kudai Kam.

"I'll give these beads to you before I die." Saosh sighed with relief.

"When my body has decayed, and there is nothing left but the skeleton that lies on the arankas, you will cut a small plate out of the area above the bridge of the nose," he said, pointing to the space between the eyebrows.

"Right here. Do you see?"

"Ah! I see," he nodded.

"It will connect you to my Kut, with my Power. When you count these beads, all the previous shamans and I will come to help you in your ritual. You will feel our Power, aid and support. You will know that you are not alone and that we are helping you."

"Yes, I will do this!"

"And then your successor will do the same with your bone."

"And then I'll be helping him together with all of you?"

"Of course! But this will not happen until he gains his power."

"Or else?..."

"Or else the powers of so many shamans can drive him mad, he won't be able to bear it. And the power that we cannot control, be it authority, fame or money, becomes destructive to us. We have to be able to be aloof and seek the good for the entire world and the creation. Then this power will help us. But it will destroy an egoist wallowing in his selfish dreams," said Kudai Kam, hiding the beads in his waist bag.

"So that's it...."

"Yes, my friend. And now it's time to sleep. Get ready to go to bed."

Lying on the soft and warm deerskins that emitted a distinctive but familiar smell, Saosh dreamt of becoming a Great Shaman in the distant future. He would also have such powerful magical beads. Falling asleep, he suddenly saw his decayed body resting upon the shaman arankas under the dazzling starry sky. And his successor, a new mighty shaman, cut a bead out of his nose bridge. And Saosh's Kut was transferred to him. Saosh was now free and flew up to Tengri Khan, the God of Eternity. And dissolved in the embrace of Eternity...

Ayami

Saosh was walking with Kudai Kam through the summer mountain taiga. It was a hot July day filled with a sense of tranquil peace and stately leisureliness. They were surrounded by tall silver-fir trees that were clad in dark green finery, thick branches with fleshy needles. They were about

thirty meters tall and so thick that it would take two men to encircle them. Being heated by the sun caused them to exhale the most delicate perfume that suffused the forest with an atmosphere of vigour and power. Amber tears of resin were streaming down the tree trunks. The golden droplets, glittering in the sun, emitted the same harsh but pleasant odour.

Cedars could also be found in certain places. They stood out majestically amongst the fir trees and were dressed in bushy caps of long silver-green needles. A weasel now appeared, hiding behind a tree trunk. It peeked out its light-beige snout and pricked up its big ears. Having noticed that the uninvited guests were looking back at it, the weasel quickly hid behind the tree trunk and left. Kudai Kam and Saosh gave a merry laugh in reply and continued walking.

Soon the path rose, the forest began to thin, and our travellers came to the alpine meadows. The area was full of grass, flowers and insects. On these montane grasslands,, motley grass emitted a sweet fragrance as it grew. The meadows, scattered with bright and fragrant flowers, were ablaze with all the colours that could be found in nature. There were bluebells, fragrant pink rhododendrons, large white chamomiles, and other small sweet-scented florets unknown to Saosh. Mosses and lichens ensconced themselves cosily between the rocks. Everything you could imagine bloomed blossomed and exhaled fragrance. The beautiful flowers were covered with furry bumblebees and colourful butterflies. They were flitting around with a vibrant hum and were an unending source of fascination and loveliness. It seemed that this time, filled with the heat and the wonderful natural harmony, would never end. The caressing sun had climbed to its zenith, shining brightly and giving warmth and strength to all living things. Huge white clouds towered high above the endless blue sky, their fanciful forms remind one of the temples of Tengri, the God of Eternity.

Looking at them, Saosh thought, "This is the place where the Gods live! And Tengri Khan may show his face here at any moment. I will behold the Eternal, that space where time has no power over men!"

As they continued walking the ascending path, they came over the hill pass and started descending into the blossoming mountain valley. Such places were untouched by man, and one could feel the wonderful energy of nature filling them with serenity and happiness. The happiness that filled the entire being of the person who was fortunate enough to visit these lands.

Kudai Kam led his apprentice into an absolutely new world where he was to be cleansed and learn.

Why must they go that far, you may ask? Especially since Saosh already lived so close to nature. What's the point?

You are perfectly right. And It's important to understand that when a

shaman-to-be lives among people, the people around the apprentice constantly remind them of what kind of person they think the apprentice is, where the apprentice comes from, and what they think the apprentice's purpose in life is. The shaman-to-be may forget their higher calling. It is too difficult for them to overcome all this and continue to move on their path. For this, there is a Great Kam to help them. That is why our hero had embarked on this long and difficult journey.

Having come to the ascent, right before the steep slope where the path began to climb upwards, Kudai Kam bowed to the mountain and said:

"Let us into your realm, blessed Ayami, patroness of this land! Receive us favourably. We admire you, your Power and Might and seek your protection!"

With this, he put his right palm on his chest and made a low bow.

Saosh repeated this ritual following Kudai Kam. Then the travellers continued their ascent.

When Kudai Kam began to climb up the steep path, he said:

"These places of Power are temples of the ancients, the followers of Shamanism. Those who are heathens don't see the need to build special temples, churches, datsans or synagogues. For us, places of Power like the mountain peaks, abrupt, beautiful coastlines, and clean, untouched lakes are the temples. They are places one can go to be closer to the Gods. Shamans know them and go there only when the need arises in order not to disturb the spirits. And none of the artificial, man-made temples can compare with any of God's creations. In these places, they commune with the powerful spirits of the Yarsu (water and earth spirits) and with the Gods. It is a very special atmosphere. Which is why one should enter these places in silence and with great reverence and awe."

At last, the trees ended, and the travellers came to the alpine meadows once again. They were surrounded by vigorously blooming flowers and fragrant rhododendrons. The air was sultry and filled with the power of the July sun. The hum of thousands of various insects blended into a wonderful chorus. Bright butterflies fluttered all around. Every now and then, playful birds would chase each other from one branch to another. Their grown fledglings, still tailless but already able to fly were learning all the intricacies of avian survival from their parents. From flower to flower, the colourful butterflies occasionally fluttered. The sun was scorching, and the travellers began to pour with sweat. The ascent was long and difficult. Kudai Kam was in no hurry, trying to feel and absorb this place's impressions and energy. Imitating his behaviour, Saosh was also walking silently, drinking in the energy of nature with every fiber of his body.

"In the wild, where there are almost no people," said Kudai Kam, "the Ayami always talk to and help those who come to them asking for help. In the places that are crowded with people, they've become silent."

“But why?” asked his apprentice.

“They are unwilling to talk to those who are unable to listen. You wouldn’t want to talk to someone sitting with their back to you, would you?” The young man nodded quietly.

“So only in the places where people rarely show up are the Ayami ready to talk. They won’t let just anybody in. Ordinary people seek easier and calmer paths.”

“You’re right, Kudai Kam. I remember when I was young, my parents used to take me to this place – “The Sunbaths” is the name. It is near where the Katun River and the Chuysky Trakt cross. What a place it was! Quiet, peaceful and harmonious. Not a piece of trash, not a trace of human presence. The trees were untouched. I can still remember it. The water in the pools was so clean. I remember swimming in them. The little pools were warmer, and the big pools were cooler. I still remember what I felt when I was a child. I really felt Ayami talk to me. The river itself, which was flowing nearby, whispered its a lullaby to me. I remember falling asleep in a hut to those sounds. Fifteen years later, I visited that place again on my own. My God, what happened to that place! I could hardly recognize it!.. They had put campgrounds everywhere, and the entire coast was now furrowed with trails. The trees had been picked bare, like an old skeleton. What had become of their lush and full branches? Bottles and trash were everywhere. Even in the pools! Can you imagine, Kudai Kam!

The Great Shaman gave a reproachful nod.

“And the saddest thing,” Saosh went on, “is that the place has become almost desolate. You wouldn’t want to go into that water anymore. It seemed to have become dirty, both literally and figuratively. It seemed as if the whole coast was dying. And Ayami is very angry with the people who treat her in such an exploitative manner.”

“You’re right, my friend, you’re right.”

“And I did not feel the excitement in that place anymore. But here!.. I can feel my soul and body cleansing,” said Saosh with amazement and joy.

“With every step, I feel lighter and easier inside. As if I’m relieving myself from some old and unnecessary burden.”

The Soul And The Body

“Yes. All the troubles and woes of men, all the illnesses that arise, come from the dirt they have created around themselves,” said Kudai Kam. “They have lost their bond with nature, so there’s no harmony inside them. Only the communion with nature can make them truly happy. The dwellers of a remote village are kinder and more open than those who live in a metropolis, who don’t pay attention to each other or anything around them.”

"Yes, it's a good point, Kudai Kam," the young man nodded. "Each time I happen to be in a big city, I see fussy, nervous and embittered people. They are always in a hurry, wanting to outrun each other. Some are even elbowing people out of their way. Obviously, they are very cramped together. It's so stifling there!"

"That's true, my friend. Here, there's a lot of space. And people rarely see each other. If you go to a forest and manage to see one person in ten miles, you're lucky. People actively try to meet each other here because your fellow man is your possibility to survive, to support each other in the time of need. Whereas in a metropolis, people meet each other too often. There's not enough space for them there. And each person they meet is not seen as a support or help, but rather as a threat and a danger as stress. They are constantly rubbing against each other's auras. They create this 'nervous electricity' that the city is drowning in. The people in such cities create physical and spiritual filth they will soon perish in. They worry too much about the lowest parts of their being and forget about their soul." "Yes, there are so many advertisements there, that even if a person doesn't need a thing, because what they have already will last at least ten years, they go to a shop anyway to buy it. It doesn't matter that they don't need it. They just buy it. And then it lies in their home and collects dust. They may use it once, and then they lose interest in this thing which is the end of it. It's puzzling to me why a person works all the time, to just waste their salary on things they don't need. Life is passing them by, and they are buried in work, continuing to live in this way. It's ridiculous!"

"That's a good point!" Kudai Kam smiled in approval. "People worry about the moral body too much. They forget their higher calling. Because, first and foremost, a person is a soul. This earth they live in is just a temporary home, and the permanent home is in heaven."

"I wonder if I had lived a few years in a metropolis, away from nature, would I have become like them," Saosh gave a sudden laugh. "What an awful thought! Why are things like this, Kudai Kam?"

"People are blind and think their main life is within the physical body here on earth. They think that everything must revolve around its needs. This is the greatest delusion. Actually, the mortal body is just a temporary habitat for the soul. A person shouldn't worry so much about the body's needs because many of them are made-up, exaggerated, or absurd."

"Then what are we doing here?" asked Saosh in surprise. "What is all this for?"

"Here on earth, in the physical body, the soul gets the experience it cannot get in heaven, which is needed to complete its knowledge and wisdom. Here it will experience ignorance, suffering and different limitations, living in a very heavy and uncomfortable physical body. All or most of the negative experiences necessary for learning, it receives right here on earth, incarnated

in the physical body.”

“So suffering?”

“It’s suffering and limitations of the mind and the abilities. And ignorance, being aware of one’s own helplessness. Vices and temptations. Treachery, clinging to things and then mourning their loss, new encounters and endings. Illness, infirmity, old age, physical suffering, hunger, pain. And many other things. To name but a few. It is important for you to experience this for yourself.”

“Of course, and I have. But what does a soul do in heaven?” asked Saosh. “It rests. In heaven, the soul knows everything. There is no lie there. It travels at the speed of thought. To any place, at its will. There are no earthly concerns and hardships, illnesses, senility, or need for food. Life in those terms is very easy there. There’s no physical body with its limitations, ignorance and sluggishness. And our earthly life is just its faint reflection.”

“Then is earthly life all doom and gloom, Kudai Kam?” the young man asked sadly.

The Karmyosi

“No, my friend. There are dead Karmyosi who try to help people of the earth all the time. They give us signs, warn us, and shape the circumstances in such a way so that people don’t commit fatal errors.

“Sorry to interrupt you, Kudai Kam. This is the case when a person is late for the place which is bound to crush, right?”

“That’s right.”

“I’ve had a few of such occurrences in my life. I remember one of them very well. I was about ten. One day my father and I wanted to cross a river on horseback by the hanging bridge. It was spring. The river was overflowing with a fast current of turbulent and roaring water. It was frightening to look down. But we hesitated a little and didn’t go straight away. Father was shifting our belongings from bag to bag for some reason. As if he was searching for something. I kept asking him, ‘Pa, when shall we go?’ But I had that terrible sinking feeling. My heart was pounding from fear. I thought that it was because of the water, and that it would be over when we’d cross the river. So we stood on the bank until another horseman came to the river. He wasn’t one of the locals, not one of our people. He asked us something, I don’t remember what it was, and stepped on the bridge. And his horse jibbed and just refused to go, you know. The rider kept whipping it up. So, just before reaching the middle of the bridge, he swayed awkwardly. We hear that low snap. The ropes that supported the bridge didn’t hold and tore. The bridge tilted, and the man and his horse fell off. One second – and he was in the water. My dad and I ran

along the bank and started throwing him some sticks, ropes, and everything that was near at hand. We thought that the current would wash him ashore, and we'd manage to drag him out. Far from it! He couldn't swim as far as half the distance. The water was cold. He got cramps in his arms and legs. We saw him struggle fiercely, trying to swim with all his strength. But then his motions became slower. He suddenly stopped moving and started drifting downstream. In the next moments, a wave overwhelmed him, and we saw him no more. The horse remained afloat a little longer. But then it shared the same fate. It was very scary! Father turned back to go home. We were going in silence. He was smoking all the time. And I couldn't help thinking, 'That could have happened to us! That could have happened to us! How awful!' And I kept thanking God for saving us. We didn't tell mother anything, of course. But this episode has lived with me all my life. Father said to me, 'If something doesn't let you go further, you must listen to this feeling.' I asked him many times why it was like that. But he didn't answer. He just said, 'You simply must do so, that's all!' I do so all the time. Now I understand that it was the Karmyosi who saved us. So that's the way it is!"

"Yes, that's right, my friend. They helped you. Karmyosi constantly interferes in people's lives. They try to save them and give them various signs. Everything could be perfect, but people are too concerned about mortal life, worldly desires and interests. Their mind is limited by their traditional perception. They don't listen to themselves, their states, feelings or emotions. They don't think about what these tell them. They pursue some earthly goals like squirrels in a cage. And they become deaf and unable to hear them, to accept their help."

"Just like that horseman?"

"Exactly. Sadly, a person thinks he can shape his future independently, without the help of the spirits and Gods. He is overconfident. And that destroys him. Only a great shaman free from these delusions and limitations can directly commune with the dead Karmyosi. This is the source of all his powers, the ability to obtain knowledge and command the elements of nature, to find those lost in the taiga, to heal, and many other things."

"Only a shaman can do that?" asked the young man again. "But what about my father, who pointed it out to me?"

"Yes, you're right. This must be either a shaman or someone who has spent a long time in nature in places of Power. He can connect to the Karmyosi and their help. If your father was a shaman, he would have heard directly what the Karmyosi told him and could stop that horseman. And he wouldn't have died."

"But why only shamans commune with the spirits?" asked Saosh Yant. "Because a shaman sort of dies while alive."

“Oh! How is that, Kudai Kam?”

“Well, not literally. He still has the connection to the body, but he perceives the world as if he is already dead. I mean to say that the Karmyosi spirits and the spirits of place, the Ayami, take his soul out of his body and show him their own world. And he starts seeing the world the same way the dead see it. No one else can perceive it that way. Only a shaman, who is specially trained, can do that. Besides, he is also trained to act in this immense world. Not just passively go with the flow of his perception, but to be active, to make decisions and to remember his main purpose: to help somebody, to find the lost or to heal the sick. To take a soul from Erlik, the God of Death, and return it to the man. And many other things. After a young shaman has learnt to do all those things when in a trance, he can separate from his physical body, which suppresses the soul’s abilities and powers. And he can act in heaven and enjoy all its powers. That is where all the might and superpowers of a shaman come from.”

“Tell me, Kudai Kam, will I be able to do such things myself?” his apprentice asked impatiently.

“It depends on your hard work and perseverance,” said Kudai Kam ironically, casting a piercing, almost unbearable look at the young man. And again, Saosh felt his flesh creep under this gaze. It made his heart sink. He didn’t quite feel himself. As if he was being transilluminated with a thousand X-rays.

“You mean,” asked Saosh in a hurry in order to escape the uneasy feeling, “because of our mortal body, we can’t have the superpowers so natural to the soul?”

“Yes, it’s because of the body which suppresses it. It binds us to earth and prevents us from perceiving the subtle world.”

“What a pity!” exclaimed the young man with disappointment. “It would be so nice if we knew everything and had such abilities and didn’t make mistakes in our life. That horseman might have survived if he had such powers.”

“Yeah, but in that case, people wouldn’t get the necessary impressions, which are the purpose of their life here on earth,” smiled Kudai Kam. “We must get this experience. Trials, errors, frustrations, findings, losses, illnesses and cures, ignorance and so on. It’s a kind of game in which a person must unravel the main puzzle and find the solution. If every man had such powers, the game would be uninteresting. No one would ever make any mistakes. They’d stop doing many of the things at all. Most of the time, they’d just sit by the fire, commune with nature, with the spirits, the Karmyosi and the Ayami. With the Gods!”

“And life would become boring....”

“Of course. That’s why people have limited perception and are ignorant and weak. There is a restriction in the form of the physical body that holds

back the perception in the physical world.”

The Subconscious And The Shaman Scission

“I’m just wondering, Kudai Kam, does the subconscious possess a power or not?”

“The subconscious is the very soul, or rather souls, which a person isn’t aware of.”

“Wait, wait, Kudai Kam. What souls are you talking about? We are always taught that we have a soul and a body. And you’re saying ‘souls’. What do you mean by this?”

“We don’t have just one soul, my friend,” the shaman smiled. “You mean?...”

“Every man has five souls. Each is responsible for its own function. Like your body has arms, legs, and a head, which do their job, and five souls that perform specific functions. One soul is responsible for the perception of the future, another one – the past, the third controls the vital force, the fourth travels through worlds, and the fifth connects us to Eternity. They possess great powers and knowledge. Without them, a man is but a piece of meat. The problem for many people is that they don’t see the abilities of their souls and can’t make use of them.”

“But will you teach me this?”

“Of course. That’s why you’ve come to me. However, not right now.” Saosh fell silent and took a long look at the Great Shaman.

“Often ‘the subconscious’ means the activity of the benevolent Aru and the malevolent Kara – the light and dark spirits that constantly influence the man’s behaviour. They fight for him to make him do good or bad things. But he can’t see this fight and perceives it only as the appearance of different thoughts and emotional states which he considers to be his, unaware of their true nature.”

“Excuse me, is it when he kind of becomes a different person? Something like that?”

“Yes, everything in the man is changing all the time.”

“Ah, now I remember! This one time, my parents were getting ‘divorced’ similarly,” laughed Saosh Yant. “In the morning, everything was fine, but in the afternoon, they would start to argue. They yelled and abused each other, breathing fire and fury, ready to tear each other to pieces. But in the evening, it was peace and quiet again. And the next day, everything would repeat. I was six years old at that time. Brother and sister were just babies. They sat under the table like animals at bay, watching these scenes with horror. And I was scurrying between mom and dad crying, ‘Dad! Mom! Make it up!’ Bah! ‘Back off, let us do this on our own, will you?’ that was all I heard in return as if they just didn’t hear me. When angry, they become

totally different people every time. A moment ago, they were exchanging caresses, and five minutes later, they were already shouting at each other. 'Let's break up!' they yelled. My mother had nowhere to go with three children. So she didn't leave. Then they were shown to one shaman. He said, 'Come again in a week!' They came. The entire village took us there. We spent three days in the shaman's tent. I still remember the fire burning in the middle and many strange things which I wasn't allowed to touch. The shaman kept whispering something into his drum. He sprinkled water gave them some stones to hold in their hands and made them wear amulets. On the third day, mother suddenly broke into such a terrible paroxysm! Everyone thought she would lose her mind. She started rushing around the tent, smashing everything up. She even threatened to kill the shaman and let out her rage at her husband. And then she suddenly wilted, became flaccid and collapsed on the ground, senseless.

Father was also very sick. He spent the night half-conscious and fell asleep only towards the morning. At dawn, they woke up totally different people. They were so content. Happy! When we returned home, mom became calm and kind. She began to take care of dad. He quit drinking. We started having more money. Now we could afford to buy new things. The money spent on alcohol was now spent on more useful things. I got new toys, and dad bought a motorcycle, mom got a new dress, shoes and beads. My little brother had a scooter, and my sister got a doll. I can say things straightened out."

"That's good. The shaman treated them well. He drove out the malevolent Kara spirits, which had been plaguing them inwardly. They made them fight and argue with each other. People simply don't understand WHAT they are driven by. They think that they decide to get angry themselves, argue or even fight. It's the malevolent spirits that possess them."

"But why is it so, Kudai Kam?" asked the young man sadly. "Why don't we understand that?"

"That's the way the Gods play with us."

"What an outrage!" Saosh Yant stamped his foot with vexation.

"Don't you worry. We are possessed not only by evil spirits but also by good ones."

"Really?"

"Yes. Like your parents, for instance."

"You know, Kudai Kam, they did live in perfect harmony from then on."

"That's right. Because Aru, the benevolent spirits, got into them. That's why their life has improved."

"Also, they have been wearing those amulets ever since."

"That's right, and they help establish contact with the good spirits."

"Ah! I see!" Saosh Yant was "enlightened". "Kudai Kam, have you ever seen these spirits, I wonder?"

“Yes, I have!”

“Tell me!”

“When the ancestor shaman took my soul out of the body, and I thought I was dying or going mad. It was horrific! I was undergoing excruciating torture. I couldn’t imagine suffering could be SO great! Even more so because it was my first time. I saw the subtle world where the spirits live. It was very different from what we have here. I saw some forms, and then they would soon change into something else. All things were flowing and blending into each other. I saw a sight, and it would turn into another. As if there were no distinguished boundaries between them. The ancestor shaman told me later that it was because my brain was working that way. My mind.”

“What do you mean?”

“You see, it’s something like trying to look at an object while turning your head in different directions.”

“Like a drunk, you mean?”

“The thing is, this is how the mind of all people works. Or most of them,” laughed Kudai Kam. “Their mind drifts all the time. And mine used to drift too. Then, I saw all the monsters at once, rather unexpectedly.

The malevolent spirits that live near the earth (you call this place the Underworld) pounced on me and began to absorb my energy. There were no boundaries between us!!! I thought I was in hell. Oh, how jubilant and joyful they were! Just revelling in my energy. They roared with laughter, howled, slurped. That was horrible! I wanted to break free and run away. I felt unbearable pain, fear, disgust and despair. But that made them even more excited and wild. The spirits of all diseases, hardships, hunger, chaos, negative emotions and other sufferings known to the man, attacked me together. They were tearing me to pieces, devouring my energy. It was the most horrible thing that could happen to a man! They kept torturing me, and I just couldn’t break free. The harder I tried, the greater my suffering became. I couldn’t close my eyes or turn my head away, or hide. I couldn’t even breathe freely. I felt my lungs being scorched by unbearable fire from within. That torture seemed to be going on forever. I thought it would never stop. I was in utter despair and panic.

But then, when they had devoured me, or it seemed they had, the benevolent spirits interfered in this mayhem and drove the demons away. As soon as they appeared, I saw a dazzling light. I turned to it and saw the whole army of Light approached me, led by a shaman ancestor. The demons were terrified. They started trembling and moaning, still holding me in their strong claws. The light was coming nearer. I distinctly saw the boundary between light and dark drawing near. The closer it came, the stronger and more furiously the evil spirits seized me. I didn’t turn my head away, and only that saved me. Somehow I managed to do it. I don’t

remember how, though. Apparently, my prayer was very strong and integral. At the last moment, when the light casting away the dark, slowly but steadily, came up to me and touched my toes, the demons left me. With a wild, inhuman howl, they fled, and with them, the darkness disappeared too. First, I felt that I'd gone blind with that intolerably bright light, but then, when I got used to it, I felt completely drained. As if all my contents had been removed. And I became an empty bag."

"A bag of bones?"

"No! That's just the thing – I didn't have any bones either. There was just 'something' that was called 'me'. But that feeling was very relative. And then the ancestor shaman slowly, meticulously, put me back together piece by piece. Each part of my body, each bone, and each organ eaten by the evil spirits were put in their places by him. He literally sculpted me anew of the digested parts of my body."

"Wait, wait, Kudai Kam. How can it be? You said you were eaten...."

"But that's the thing – thanks to that, I got the immunity to these malevolent spirits. And I learnt how to overcome them because I literally knew them all by name, I knew my enemy, so to speak, and could fight them. Besides, the souls of the dead animals became my assistant spirits and the ancestor shaman – my guardian spirit. With such help, I have gained power. The ability to command the spirits of hardships, illnesses and misfortunes. And I am able to defend people from them."

The Hell As It Is, Or Forget About Your Attachments

"But does hell exist?" asked Saosh Yant.

"Hell?" grinned Kudai Kam. "Of course, it does." "Oh, that's interesting! Please, tell me!"

"It is an intermediate state between the world of the living and the world of the dead. When a wicked man dies and, seemingly, leaves the physical world, he goes on living in the habits, desires, and cravings formed on earth. He sort of remains in suspense: he cannot leave the earth and go away for good, nor can keep on living as he did while in his body. So he suffers afflictions for a while, until all that simmers down in him."

"I wonder what he is feeling then."

"Afflictions. I tell you, he is suffering afflictions." "But what do you mean?"

"He is always finding an excuse for his negative emotions. For example, he sees that people go on living without him. They use the property that he has been earning all his life. They live in his house, divide his possessions and take away his cattle. And in cities, they clean out his accounts, take control of his business and real estate, and enjoy his cars and yachts. And

so on. Greed and anger begin to master him, but he cannot do anything about it.”

“What if he was a poor man and had no cars or yachts?”

“It doesn’t matter. It makes no difference if he was rich, poor, or of average means. What is important is his attachment to worldly concerns. What these concerns are is of little importance. So, he is yelling, swearing, foaming at the corners of his mouth, breathing fire, belching clouds of smoke, but nobody hears him. He can see everyone and understand everything, but no one can see or hear him! They go on living their lives before his very eyes. The poor fellow can’t turn his head away, close his eyes, sleep, or divert his attention away. And that makes him suffer greatly. He feels constant torment, moaning, writhing with terrible pain, but he can’t help himself. He can’t do anything about what he sees either. He keeps asking himself, ‘How come? This can’t be happening! How can they do this?! These are the people who have always told me that they love and respect me. This was my best friend, and now he has fraudulently taken possession of all I had?! And this was my wife, who has now married him! I can’t believe this!’ And so forth....”

“And after his death, other people can say bad things about him which they were afraid to tell him outright. Am I right, Kudai Kam?”

“Yes, you are! That’s why there’s an old saying: ‘Say nothing but good of the dead!’ But now people forget about it. They think nobody can hear them and freely speak ill of the dead. And he can hear everything. And that causes him unbearable suffering.”

“And how long can this go on?”

“The wretched person stays near the earth for a while because he still has many attachments that don’t allow him to understand that he is free now and can leave them behind and pass to God. But the poor fellow doesn’t understand it.”

“Uh-oh! My gosh! How awful!” Saosh Yant couldn’t help but laugh. “Further, he sees his wife build a new relationship with somebody else. And he just boils over: ‘Leave her alone! She is mine! Don’t touch her! She belongs to me!’ But no one can hear him. They think he’s dead. Because ordinary people can’t perceive the subtle worlds. Only shamans can do that.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but please tell me this! It happens that sometimes the dead start haunting us. They knock and rustle, and they arouse sudden feelings. They cause certain things to happen. Or come to us in our dreams. Are they trying to tell us something? To express dissatisfaction? For example, when my grandfather died, things fell off in our house for over a month. At nights we were always awakened by the rustle of somebody’s footsteps. And we all felt that grandfather was alive and walking in the house.”

"Yeah, such things happen. But only dark mages and wicked sorcerers do so. Or very powerful people who have a lot of force in them. Or those who died young, unexpectedly. Or in case of violent death. But their energy ends sooner or later, and they quiet down."

"But my grandfather wasn't a wicked sorcerer or a dark mage!"

"Then he did possess a lot of vital force. One way or another, the dead have to leave this world."

"But what's the point of bothering the living?"

"There's no point!" Kudai Kam laughed his sincere, frank laugh. "It just happens automatically. People don't feel responsible for themselves. Moreover, the living doesn't usually perceive the signals that come out of the subtle world. Should they have a dream, at best, they go to see a psychologist, but usually, they just shake it off and live on. Something falls down – they just pick it up and mind their own business. If they hear a noise or a rustle, they tell themselves, 'Ah, it must've been my imagination!' And certain feelings or impressions people usually neglect completely. Even if they are bound to die in half an hour, and everything inside them turns upside down, they just tell themselves, 'I have to do it!' And they get on a plane which then crashes. Not to mention the signals coming from the dead! Nobody ever thinks of that. That's it!"

"So what does it all mean? The dead with strong attachments always want to interfere in people's lives and do everything their own way?" summed up the young man.

"Yes, that's right. And since they are staying near the earth, because of the attachments, they are often attacked by the wicked spirits who live there."

The Karakarmyos-Aldaichi

"Little by little, his blindness disappears, and the man begins to sober up. At first, he realizes with utmost clarity that, AS A MATTER OF FACT, HE IS DEAD!!!"

"But how come one can't understand it right away, Kudai Kam?" laughed Saosh.

"Come to think of it, most people, in fact, don't realize that they are dead."
"Oh, dear!"

"They go on living their everyday life automatically, and they do the same things, talk to the same kind of people. But suddenly, they begin to understand that something is wrong."

"What exactly?"

"For example, the living can't hear them. They don't answer their questions, don't fulfil their wishes, don't comply with their requests and demands." "Wow, well!"

"You may find it funny, but they don't! They find themselves in a sort of

vacuum.”

“Is it similar to when a person is being boycotted, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, sort of. People who live on earth don’t react to him at all. He is trying to tell them something, to ask, to touch. But all his efforts produce no results. The hands of the dead person go through the bodies of the living. His screams and appeals are not heard, even if, as he might think, he is ‘shouting right in the ear’. And then he feels a surge of despair. With his whole being, he starts to realize WHAT happened to him. And this very despair attracts all the demons, which gladly begin to absorb his energy. They eat him away. Moreover, the attachments to the physical world don’t let him pull away from its ties. The poor fellow can wander near the earth like that, looking with despair, frustration and greed at what is happening among the living. He sees how people treat him in reality, and he hears their remarks about him which are far from being complimentary. He sees that they are using ‘his’ property. Altogether it is the hardest time for the deceased. So others often either pray for him or perform shamanistic rituals in order to help him.”

“And how long can it last, Kudai Kam?” the young man’s eyes showed genuine interest.

“It depends. Forty to forty-nine days on average.” “Big deal!” Saosh Yant whistled.

“Ha! Big deal? It seems an eternity for him.”

“But why?”

“Because even a minute there is a whole century. And forty days is an eternity. The stronger the man’s emotions are, the longer and more painfully it drags on.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“You see, emotions completely seize a man there. He experiences them with his whole being, totally, integrally. He cannot get away from it all, sleep, or take a sedative. He cannot have a smoke or a drink. Or a meal. He can’t fall asleep. Nothing. He is accustomed to pacifying or distracting himself. But that was possible while he had a physical body. And after his death, his soul is restless, and it is swept over by the emotions it is experiencing. And these emotions, as I said, are far from being pleasant.”

“The most unpleasant is more like it,” the young man smiled bitterly. “So that’s why the first forty days after the person’s death are so important?”

“Yes. As a rule, during this period, the soul of an ordinary man manages to realize WHAT happened to it....”

“The fact that it has separated from the body?”

“Yes. Besides, it severs the attachments to the earthly life.”

“Wait, wait, Kudai Kam! You mentioned forty to forty-nine days if I heard you right.”

“That’s right. There are several ‘stages’ of this separation.” “Oh! That’s

interesting!"

"The first stage takes the first three days. During this period, the etheric body, together with the other subtle bodies, separates from the physical one and then floats in close proximity to earth."

The Aldaichi. The Syur

"Oh, yes! That reminds me, when my grandfather died for the first three days, we had a feeling that he actually wasn't dead, that he was just resting without getting up. Still, he could do so at any moment. When I was looking at his face, I was even afraid that he was just about to open his eyes and say something."

"Yes, this is so. But on the third day, the first stage of the destruction begins, the destruction of the shadow Syur. It is also known as the ghost."

"What is this shadow, Syur?" wondered the young shaman.

"The Syur," grinned Kudai Kam, "is a very interesting thing. Have you ever seen pale shadows hovering near the graves in the cemetery?"

"No, I haven't," he answered, shuddering. "But I have heard."

You have. Good. So, the Syur is a sort of shell that binds the flesh to the other four souls. An interlink, so to speak, between the body, essentially a corpse, and the four souls. Tes, Bos, Kut and Aiy."

"And can you tell me what this shadow Syur looks like?"

"It is much the same as our physical body. Only a little bit bigger. But unlike the physical body, it doesn't have a static shape and can alter to a certain extent. It can fly wherever it pleases, in its imagination."

"And what happens to the Syur after the person's death?"

"It remains in close proximity to the physical body. It can be said that after the death of the physical body, one's conscious awareness moves into the Syur."

"Yeah, we had this oppressive feeling at night. And in the morning, everything was calm. By the way, why is the body committed to earth on the third day? Why can't it be buried or cremated right away?"

"Because the man remains alive for these three days." "WHAT?!!" Saosh was greatly surprised.

"As long as his Syur, or ghost, is not destroyed, it can well return back into the physical body."

"..."

"Such things often happened: a person was buried, and then he woke up in a coffin."

"Ah! I've heard of that," nodded Saosh Yant. "It is said that Gogol died like that. When his grave was dug out, and the coffin opened, they saw that his face was twisted in a horrible grimace, and the coffin lid was badly scratched on the inside. I wouldn't wish SUCH a death to anyone!"

The Uzut

"Shamans are lucky for they are buried on arankases. An arankas is a platform made of wood of such a size that's just enough for one person. They are placed between four trees about two meters above the ground level."

"Wait a moment, Kudai Kam! Do I get it right that shamans are not buried in the ground but simply put on this platform?"

"Yes, you got that right."

"Unbelievable," Saosh flung up his hands. "But why is this so?" "Because shamans go to the Upper World. It is our custom. It is good." "How come? I mean, birds may come and begin to eat the remains." "It's good too. They carry the shaman's soul away to the Upper World."

"Oh, dear!" said Saosh in surprise and fell silent.

"So that if you return to life, you can get up and come back home," laughed Kudai Kam merrily.

"Don't say that! What about your relatives? They can even go crazy!" "They can! My great-grandfather came back like that. I was just a boy at that time. I remember the night was so dark. No moon, no stars, and the lights in the houses were out. It was dead silence. And right in the middle of the night, he began to knock on the door. Everyone was frightened: they thought an uzut had shown up."

"Wait, wait, what is that?"

"An uzut is a dead man's spirit. It comes to take someone to the next world with it. And my great-grandfather was very strong, you know. He knocked off the door with one sweep and said, 'It's me. Don't you recognize me?' But they just scattered with shrieks and squeals, like animals that run back into their holes. He goes to his son – he dashes away from the house. He approaches his wife – she shrinks into a corner with her hands over her head and starts crying quietly. He goes to the daughter-in-law – she writhes in hysterics and screams, 'Don't touch me, I'm in a delicate condition. Have mercy on my innocent soul, and on me!' He runs to all his kin with open arms – they run away from him in different directions. It took him a while to convince everyone, to prove that he was not an uzut, not a ghost, that he simply had returned to life. That he wasn't going to take anyone to the next world. He even tried to touch them – they had an even greater fit of hysterics. Everybody was about to go out of their mind. The entire village came up running when they heard the cries. The lights in all the houses lit up. There was an incredible turmoil."

"Oh, dear!" Saosh roared with a hearty laughter.

"Yeah, but they didn't find it funny. Anyway, it ended when Anchar, great grandfather's dog, ran up to him and started joyously licking his hands,

wagging its tail. The people stood still, amazed. Silence fell upon the scene. They started watching what would happen to the dog, whether the uzut would take it with him or not... They stood and watched – he didn't take the dog. They were all shocked. There was dramatic confusion. And then I threw myself into his arms, shouting happily, 'Grandpa! Grandpa! You came back!' He picked me up, raised me high up in the air and laughed, "This is my future successor! I sense the power in him!" All our kin sighed with relief. They ran up to him and began to kiss and hug him. Finally, everyone understood that he wasn't dead, that he wasn't an uzut, that the Gods simply didn't take him yet."

"Ha-ha-ha! That's a good one!" laughed Saosh Yant cheerfully.

"Yeah. Such things happened often in those days."

"Know what, Kudai Kam? Sorry to interrupt you again, but I heard that even pathologists encounter such things during the autopsy. At first, here is what looks like a cadaver. They start dissecting it – and the man quickly comes around, but the pain shock makes him pass out again, and then the man dies. This time, for real."

"Yes, unfortunately, such things aren't rare. You're right, my friend! And then they say nothing to the relatives. They just fill in their report, give back the body and try to forget about that. Although they surely feel their huge guilt. Many lose themselves into drinking, and others retire from this profession."

"How many new and interesting things I am learning! Tell me, please, what happens next."

"Then there is a short lull, and the next such 'surge' repeats on the ninth day. But it isn't that strong."

"Indeed! That's how it happened. We buried the grandfather. On the third day, we clearly felt his presence. Then everything was sort of quiet. We began to calm down and forget about him. And on the ninth day, we were having a funeral repast for him, and we felt that he was among us again. As if he was sitting at the same table with us. But the feeling wasn't as strong as before. On the fortieth day, it repeated again. And the feeling was very subtle. It was like a faint echo of the memory of granddad. Everything seemed to have stopped on the forty-ninth day, and we accepted that he was already gone. We continued to live a somewhat new life."

"And we, shamans, when at a funeral repast, we know that the deceased is still among us, we feed him and ask him to help us. A shaman asks him how is he and if there's anything he wants."

"Tell me, Kudai Kam, how is the funeral ceremony conducted? What rites and traditions do they have?"

"It depends on the region. There're different traditions," said Kudai Kam thoughtfully.

"But still, I'd like to know," said Saosh, burning with impatience.

"Every nation, every culture has its own customs. For example, in the Christian world, the tradition is to bury the deceased. In Arabian countries in the Middle East, they normally seat the dead man in a pit. And this is done on the very first day before it starts decaying. In India, the dead are floated off in the waters of the sacred river Ganges. Or they cremate the bodies and scatter the ashes over the water of the Ganges. In Tibet, the deceased remains in his family's house for as long as forty-nine days in a separate room. His wife comes to see him every day. Every few days she turns his body from side to side. And a lama comes every day to say a prayer. This goes on for forty-nine days. Then the body is dismembered and placed on a mountaintop."

"But it will be eaten there. How so?!"

"It is good. It is considered especially good if birds eat away the flesh – this is a good sign. The soul of the deceased is going to the Upper World." "Oh, dear!"

"What, you think it would be better if worms ate it? In the grave?"

"Hmm, I never thought of that..." pondered Saosh. "Yeah, that's right! How interesting all that is. And if it's eaten by worms, what happens?"

"The soul goes to the earth spirits." "And if cremated?"

"That's better. But not always." "And when is it bad?"

"It's not good for shamans. They must cut the ties with the Kut." "How is it done?"

"Here in Altai, shamans are placed above the ground on arankases." "Yes. I already know about that."

"And the Yukaghirs in North Yakutia had rather complicated but effective rites."

"Oh! How interesting! Can you tell me?" "You won't be scared, will you?"

"Why would I be afraid of stories? They don't bite, do they?"

"Then listen. The Yukaghirs considered the body of a dead shaman as a sacred object. As a possibility to connect to his Kut, to receive patronage, protection and assistance. They specially processed the body." "They mummified it, eh?"

"No, not that," the shaman gave the young man a warning look.

"Okay, okay," Saosh started waving his hands. "I won't interrupt you again. I'll be listening quietly."

"So listen. The ancestral spirit of a Yukaghir shaman was a patron of his entire clan. First, the body was undressed and washed. Then the shaman's kinsmen carefully separated the meat from the bones with an iron hook. Then the meat was hung on a beam to be dried and jerked in the sun. To establish the connection with his Kut, the dried bones of the shaman were given out to his relatives to be used as amulets. The ancestor shaman's jerked meat was also distributed among all the kinsmen. They put their portions into an urasa made of willow branches and left killed dogs

nearby. The Yukaghirs used the bones as talismans, and they put dead dogs in the tent near the shaman's dried meat. This custom is connected with totemism. The wolf was one of the Yukaghir totems, and the dog was its domesticated substitute. The urasa was a symbol of a family tree, on whose branches the patron of the shaman lived. It also could be a prototype of pyramidal tombs. The shaman's skull was inserted into a wooden idol, for which special clothes and a mask were made. The Yukaghirs put this idol in the front corner of the house and constantly fed it with fire and smoke. Spirits like smoke. It is considered one of the offerings. They love fire too. They gladly come to it.

Similarly, the spirit of the shaman likes it when there is fire and juniper and spruce twigs are burnt as incense." "Wait a moment, Kudai Kam. I didn't quite understand this ritual. Can you explain, please, what is the point of all this?..."

"The point is to gain the favour of the shaman's spirit and to not lose the connection with it. At all times, in all cultures, people of the earth have always treated the deceased respectfully. This is because they were considered to possess a special power and might. And if they got angry, the living person was sure to get in trouble."

"Yes, I know that."

"Even the word 'mogila'¹ means 'might'. This is because a dead man knows more and can do more than the living one. That's why the dead are regarded with such reverence."

"Ah, now I understand."

"They are flattered, offered all kinds of gifts. We ensure that the deceased man is in no need of anything in the next world. We give funeral feasts and pray for him. If he was a great shaman, we ask him for assistance and protection. If he was an ordinary man, we pray for him and talk to him the right way. We pacify his frightened soul and set it on the right track so that it doesn't wander near the earth and plague the life of the living, his relatives, for instance. Anyway, since olden times, all the rituals connected with death have been considered more important than any other. Because the afterlife has always been thought the most important, the longest and real. And the mortal life is just a temporary abode for the soul. And the way a person passes away, what death he dies, and how his funeral is attended this is the most significant. Because a restless soul can fly around the earth and cause a lot of trouble."

"So what is to be done?"

"You see, it is very important to lay his soul to rest so it could leave the earth. Otherwise, it will bother the living and cause trouble."

"But why does that happen?"

¹ A Russian word for 'grave' (translator's note).

"Depends. Usually because of unnatural death."

"How is that?" laughed Saosh. "What do you mean, 'unnatural'? How can death be unnatural? Ha-ha-ha! I don't get it. What on earth are you talking about?"

"Yes, it sure can."

"Oh, God! Do tell me. Don't drag it out!"

"Then listen. This can happen in several cases. One of them is when a man dies too early and unexpectedly. In a disaster or accident, for example. He doesn't understand what happened. He wanders near the earth for a long time, resenting his loved ones for not hearing and not understanding him."

"That's how my nephew Emil died. He was so young. His leg cramped when he was swimming, and there he was!"

"Yes, I know. He also didn't understand immediately where he had to go after his death. Eventually, he went. Now his soul rests. Another case, I've told you already, is when a person was very greedy while alive. When he dies, he sees other people dispose of his property. That's perfect torture for a miser!" laughed the old man.

"Ha-ha-ha! That's too much!" echoed the young man. He fell to the floor, pulled up his legs and started rolling on the ground, laughing.

"A special category," continued Kam, "is suiciders. These people are inconsistent with the design of God, Who wanted to teach a lesson, but a man 'does not sit through the lesson' and decides 'to play hooky'. So all the unburnt energy will torment him after his death. What do you call it? Karma?"

"Yes, Kudai Kam, it's called karma," nodded Saosh. "So this karma torments him after his death."

"Ugh! I dread to think about such a thing. And there are people who dare to do it!" Saosh shook himself like a dog shakes off water.

"It's not courage. It's foolishness!" the shaman tousled the young man's hair. "Another category is the people grieved for by their loved ones. They hurt this soul greatly with their anguish and attachment to the dead person."

"But why?"

"Because although the soul is eager to go away, to leave the earth, but it can't. IT SIMPLY CAN'T! Their emotions don't let it go."

"Oh, yes! I knew such a woman. She lived alone and grieved deeply for her dead son. For about two years or so. She grew thin, and her cheeks were sunken. There were shadows beneath her eyes. Footsteps and noises could be heard around her house. As if someone was sighing. Everyone who lived nearby felt creepy. And then they called a shaman. He performed a ritual, and the inconsolable mother calmed down. And everything became quiet at once. The nights were tranquil from then on."

"Of course! The dead man's soul was laid to rest. They let it go, and it went where it was supposed to."

"Are there any other?"

"There is another category of the deceased that hover near the earth – so-called 'wish-washy ones'."

"What do you mean?"

"That's very simple, They have been 'half angels half birds' for their whole lives."

"YEAAAAH! I've seen so many people like that," drawled Saosh Yant meaningfully.

"While alive, they did not know where they went, why they lived, what powers they served, or what inspired them. So they idled their life away. And after they die, they still didn't know where to go. They don't approach the light because they didn't think of it while alive, and they don't approach the darkness because they didn't sin that much. However, they wasted their life. They weren't eager to do something good, something positive."

"Yes, I understand you, Kudai Kam. There are a lot of people like that on earth."

"There have always been quite a lot of them. But you have an easier time with them. Their emotions are faint, their attachments weak. They leave the earth after a while. They are sort of blown away by the wind."

"The wind of change?" "Yeah, sort of", nodded Kam.

"And what about the babies that died in their early years, or children who died in an accident? And others?"

"They did nothing wrong. They even didn't have time to realize where they were. So they can escape the bad consequences. They go to the upper worlds almost right away."

"Ah, I wish I had died young...." "Do not talk like that!" "What's wrong about that?"

"Only the Gods decide who should go, when and why. Therefore, you should not think about such things!"

The Great Shaman looked angry.

"I am very sorry, Kudai Kam! I didn't mean to provoke your wrath." "It's not my forgiveness you should seek."

"Whose then?"

"Do not call down the wrath of the Gods. Do you understand?"

The young man's only answer was a meaningful shrug of the shoulders...

"But you should know the most important thing," the old man softened his tone. "I'm telling you all this in order to explain one thing. Shamans must be able to find the restless souls of such people and help them."

"What do you mean 'help'?"

"It means to cut their ties with the earth, attachment to things, events, situations and, of course, to the people around. And then

determine which path the Gods have for them in store. And, of course, to show them this path. To guide them where they've deserved to go."

"Ah, now I see. It sounds rather complicated. But will you teach me how to do all these things?"

"Of course, I will. Otherwise, what's the point for me working with you? I'll teach you these and many other things too!"

"That's so great!" Saosh Yant gave a skip for joy.

"Don't rush, and don't get excited too soon. It is a very intricate art."

"All right. I'm ready! But tell me, Kudai Kam, why are all these rituals so scary? I would say terrible. Deboning a shaman... Giving his bones to people. Drilling beads out of the dead shaman's skull... What is this? What should I think of all that?"

"These are archaic rituals and customs. That is how the ancient people perceived the world. There's nothing special about it," said Kam indifferently. Then gave the young man a mischievous look.

"Ah, you're kidding, aren't you?... Yes, you are. I can tell it from the look in your eyes!"

And they both had a sincere, hearty laugh.

"Jokes aside, the bones of a dead shaman were kept to establish the connection with him."

"What for?"

"So that he could come and help, of course," for Kam, that was an evident thing.

"And it must be only the bones?" Saosh Yant wrinkled his nose in disgust.

"Not necessarily bones. You can have his magical item which was associated with him."

"Phew!" Saosh gave a sigh of relief. "But bones are better."

The Great Kam seemed to be teasing his apprentice. "There you go again!" Saosh looked awry at him.

"You don't understand. They allow a direct connection with the person. It is better...."

Saosh was silent. There was a struggle inside him. After all, he was a town dweller, so many things were unclear to him. His stereotyped perception didn't allow for a new experience.

"All right. If you're not comfortable with the bones, you can use the dead shaman's nails and hair to establish the connection with him."

"Hair, eh? Okay then," Saosh sighed with relief.

"You'll come to the necessary understanding... Not now... Later... Later..."

Saosh sat for a while, thinking over what he just heard, watching the fire in the hearth. And then he went on asking questions.

"And did they believe in the afterlife?"

"Of course they did! Each nation called it a different name. Foreexample, the

ancient Goldi² called it the buni. It was located quite deep under the ground. None of the living can find it, and only a shaman can fly there on the back of the Koori – a mystical bird, accompanied by the seon – the patron of the Buchu. The buni serves as a place of everlasting rest. Their souls will enjoy happiness and abundance, there is a lot of game in the forests, and there's no difficulty hunting it. In the buni, in the next world, the dead will enjoy a life similar to that they had here, on earth. In a word, everything is just like what we have here, only better. But the journey there is difficult and dangerous, and the way is known only to shamans. The soul of a dead man can't reach the buni itself and has to wander through the Universe until his relatives give a big funeral repast (the koza), to which they invite a shaman, who, with the help of his patrons, the seons, after a long search, eventually finds the desolate soul. Then, with the help of the Koori bird and the seon, the Buchu guides it into the buni. Into the realm of the dead.

It is very difficult to reach the buni, even for a shaman. Not every shaman always can do it successfully. Many inexperienced shamans died in the maze of the underworld on their way to the buni, and many souls were lost there. Only an old experienced shaman can travel to the buni.

The Goldi are greatly afraid of the soul of a dead person. They believe that the soul flies freely in the Universe, and, of course, nothing better than spending time near its house, the living relatives, or the places dearest to it, where it used to live before death. It stays in the house, invisible, carefully watching the living and seeing their attitude toward it. If it notices that the relatives have forgotten about it or treat it without respect, take possession of its property or ruin it, the embittered soul starts avenging: it can cause illnesses, bad luck and so on. The dead man keeps a vigilant and zealous watch on his wife. If the widow forgets about her dead husband or is even unfaithful to him, his vengeance can be scary. The dead man can send an illness upon her, for example, madness, or take away the ability to speak, to hear, to see and so on.

That is why the Goldi tries their best to comfort the dead kinsman's soul in order to gain his favour with their good attitudes. According to their beliefs, kindness is repaid in kindness. That's why the dead man likes it most when he is remembered when celebrations and feasts are held in his honour when they are attended by numerous relatives and guests – those loving and mindful people who gather to commemorate the funeral repast for the deceased.

There is a whole system of funeral rites and traditions. They are not done as simply as the modern people do them. Because how the funeral is attended determines the afterlife and the life of the living kith and kin. You know,

² A former name for the Nanai people (translator's note).

the afterlife is much more important than the mortal life.”

“And will you tell me about them?”

“Not only will I tell you, but I will also teach you everything.”

“Great!” Saosh Yant gave a skip for joy. “You know, I often felt that the dead man was watching me.”

“That’s right. But on the forty-ninth day, the soul’s connection with the earth is severed completely, and it goes away into lighter and purer worlds. Since there’re no lies there, the soul is enlightened and starts seeing things in their true colours. It lets off all the attachments to the past and wends into heaven. The man is freed from lies. Because it is the lies that cause negative emotions, the desire to do things his own way, to interfere in people’s lives, all of which make him unhappy. However, God Tengri is loving and merciful. He wouldn’t let a man suffer eternally in hell, as is believed by the Christians. He even made the mortal life not for very long so that the man wouldn’t have much trouble while living in his physical body, and be incarnated just occasionally, so that he could live in heaven most of the time, where is home for him, in happiness and pleasure.”

“That’s interesting. And can you tell me what happens to a person if he doesn’t let off his attachments? If he doesn’t do it within the forty days?”

“This wicked man temporarily becomes a *karakarmyos* – a malevolent spirit. He will live in such a state until he realizes everything and lets off the mortal life and all he has in it, and goes to heaven.”

“Oh, yes! I remember!” exclaimed Saosh Yant joyously. “There was such an occasion in our village. One day a very rich man died. We all used to call him a ‘kulak’³. While alive, he had poisoned the existence of many of his fellow villagers. Not to mention his wife and kids. After his death, they became kind of happy. Everyone marvelled at them: they should’ve been lamenting, but they were laughing. Their happiness didn’t last long, though. On the third day, they started to have all kinds of misfortunes and troubles. Now the rabbits died of some disease, every last one of them. Then the eldest son got lost in the forest, which he knew like the back of his hand, literally in broad daylight. Or the baby knocked over a kettle and scalded himself. There was a fire one night. We hardly put it out. We were lucky to notice it in time. In short, the widow and her kids had a good deal of trouble.”

“Yeah, that’s how a restless soul shows its qualities,” the Great Shaman nodded earnestly.

He became somewhat taciturn. As if he was watching or listening to something. Making no reckoning of it, Saosh went ahead with his story.

³ A member of the class of wealthy Russian peasants who became proprietors of their own farms (translator’s note).

"And a couple of months later, there was a great loss of cattle. Then people started getting sick one by one. Two men died even. We asked the shaman for help. He performed a ritual. And after that everything was fine. That wicked spirit seemed to have quieted down. Things returned to normal."

Kudai Kam was tranquilly and attentively listening to the young man, staring at him with penetrating eyes.

"Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, how did he manage to do it? Reveal me the secret."

"The secret?" The Great Kam smiled patronizingly. "There's no secret. The shaman simply sent it to the realm of the dead and put it under a spell to prevent it from returning."

"But what was it? A malevolent spirit? The spirit of the dead man?"

"That's right. It was an evil spirit that couldn't find rest. It is called an Aldaichi, and it's Erlik's servant. While it remains in hell, it devotes itself to evil and destruction, as it used to do on earth. And asking the shaman for help was the right thing to do."

"Was it that serious, Kudai Kam?"

"Yes. The shaman quieted down that spirit. If he hadn't, it could have done you all a lot more evil and harm."

Then there was silence. Saosh was sitting for a while, not knowing what to say. Then, at last, he remembered the question he had been wrestling with for a few years.

"Tell me, Kudai Kam, I have been thinking without any result. What happens to a man, or rather, to what remains of him, after all that? On the forty-ninth day onward?"

"On the forty-ninth day, the Kut disintegrates and goes into the relatives, and it's spread among them. The strongest get more of its power."

"And the deceased?"

"The deceased should go to the land of the ancestors. There is his afterlife. He remains there until he is reborn again."

"And what's the case with shamans? They are not ordinary people." "When a shaman dies, he can give his power to his successor. His apprentice. When I pass away, my Power will be yours. And you will know and be able to do all I can."

Saosh was standing with his mouth wide open. "Anyway, don't think about it now."

"Why?" the young man was sincerely surprised.

"It's too early for you to think about that! You'd better focus on what you have here."

And they continued their exciting journey.

The Konas

Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant came up to the top of the mountain, which gave a magnificent view of the surroundings. Having wiped off the sweat that covered their eyes, they breathed in the fresh mountain air and stood in awe, relieved, in silent contemplation. It seemed that the majestic snowy mountain peaks were very near, within reach of the hand. They hung over the mountain peak where our travellers were standing, but at the same time, they were far away. It was an ineffable sight. Adorned with the eternal hoary snowcaps, they seemed to be away from all that hustle and bustle that was out there, miles away, and just did not exist. The time seemed to have slowed down and flowed at a leisurely pace. And all the events are going incredibly slowly. Really slowly. Delightfully slowly. Just standing still. But what do events mean here, anyway? ETERNITY, PEACE and GRANDEUR – that was all that mountains lived by. They had been granted a whole Eternity, so they simply couldn't pay attention to trifles. THEY COULDN'T! And they surely weren't going to do that.

Below, between the mountains, blooming green valleys were stretching out. These valleys were furrowed by tumultuous, roaring and babbling rivers that flowed down from the mountain glaciers and were opposite the peaks. Life was pulsing through them! There was permanent noise coming from the toiling water, just like in the market square. The water didn't stop even for a second. With a persistence characteristic only to water, it was cutting through rock. What else did it have to do? Nothing limited its time and possibilities. And it was having as much fun as it could! It abraded the rocks, the cliffs of the gorge and the slopes of the steep waterfalls. Altered the general outline of the gorges. Split routinely gigantic boulders without ado. It crept into the tiny cracks to freeze at night, thaw out in the morning, and carry away fragments of the colossus. The water was busy day and night. Without cease. And yet it did its job. Over the years, no, over the centuries, the mountains became lower, smaller, vanishing into oblivion. But that didn't seem to worry them much. They kept on communing with Eternity.

Our travellers admired all that splendour and were delighted to imbibe the fresh air. A pleasant warm wind was rising from the valleys, bringing the fragrance of the flowering meadows. Blending with the cool of the eternal snowcaps created a feeling of freshness, enthusiasm and freedom. You can never mistake this state for another. Everyone who has been here knows it. Because it occurs in the only place on earth. IN THE MOUNTAINS! NOWHERE ELSE BUT IN THE MOUNTAINS!

In the centre of the mountain stood a stone pyramid Obo. Marking the

place of Power, it slowly grew with every traveller that came here. Beside it was a fire-pit, edged with big blackened stones. There also was an altar of sacrifice, on which blood sacrifices to the spirits had once been made. Not far off, there rose a tree of Power, a lonely pine, small and sturdy, hung with colourful Kudaimi. The vagrant wind skittishly ruffled these patches of cloth, trying to take them off the crooked bushy branches. But for some reason, it couldn't do that. There weren't many of them. Some had lost colour and were frayed with age. Some of them were about to turn to dust but kept firmly holding on to the branches.

The travellers came to the tree.

"See the ribbons – the konas?" said Kudai Kam pointing to them.

"Ah," Saosh Yant waved his hand, "people put them on the trees in the cities even."

"That's bad," Kudai Kam shook his head reproachfully. "But why?"

"Since a kona connects the person to the place where he's put it, these people establish the connection, not with a place of Power."

"With what then?" There was anxiety and surprise in Saosh Yant's voice.

"With a place of vanity and distress. There you have it!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Besides, the man didn't make any efforts to come to that place. He just took a taxi to get there. What kind of feat was that? Did he surpass himself? Or was it a display of heroism? It was just a formality. He hasn't overcome anything in himself. He hasn't sacrificed a thing. Then he can receive no Power or protection."

"Wow! Then the tradition of putting little padlocks on the bridges and along sea-fronts also negatively influences the newlywed?"

"Of course it does. You can see how many divorces we have now." "Oh, dear! I didn't realize."

"That's not much different" "What now?" asked Saosh Yant

"Now tear a band off your shirt and hang it on the tree," said the shaman.

"Ugh! Why the shirt?" Saosh Yant wrinkled his nose, perplexed. "It's a sweaty mess, and it's dirty. It needs a good wash first."

"It's good that it's sweaty. You don't need to wash anything. What is this ribbon hung here for?"

"What for?"

"To have the connection with the place of Power. But to create this connection, the kona must be made of your undershirt soaked with your emanations, your sweat with your Kut. In this case, a part of yourself will remain here. And between you and this place, some kind of invisible 'radio communication' is created, through which the energy of this place will always flow to you. The more of such konas you leave in various places of Power, the better it is for you. The more energy you will be able to attract."

"That's great!" rejoiced the young man.

“But, of course, simply to climb the mountain is not enough. Any more or less trained tourist can do it. And if he simply leaves a piece of his dirty shirt here, it won’t do any good. He must know what rituals to perform to gain the Ayami’s favour.”

“And different coins left in sacred places – is it a formality too? Must they be impregnated with emanations?”

“Exactly. Otherwise, there’s no point in leaving them there. It won’t grant you contact with the spirit of place. You must leave something of value. Something valuable and dear to you.”

“Like what?”

“Well, it can be any of your old things you have a very strong connection with. It may be inexpensive but dear to you. Something that evokes a lot of memories and emotions. Then it will establish a good connection with the Ayami of this place. And it will always give you good aid and protection.” While the Great Shaman took out his drum, Saosh Yant said a prayer and tore a band off his shirt. Then, performing the ritual given to him by Kudai Kam, he tied the kona to the tree of Power.

At The Top Of The Mountain

Saosh Yant took the firewood that he laid up and began to light up a campfire. The fire flared up, and the flames greedily licked the kindling: dry moss, straw and small twigs. The hungry fire ecstatically began to gnaw at thicker branches, then passed on to the heavy logs. The more Saosh Yant fed it, the hungrier it grew. The tips of the flame tongues barely touched the bottom of the cauldron hung over the campfire, heating the water. The young man threw the laid-up spruce twigs and the mixture of special herbs given to him by Kudai Kam. The flame's spellbinding movements had a fascination that kept the eye amused and brought warmth and joy. The feeling of harmony and life. Meanwhile, Kudai Kam took some arak⁴ and sprinkled it on the four corners of the earth. He turned to the east and said:

“Accept our offering and help us, Tengri and your spirits.” Then he turned to the south and sprinkled the arak, saying:

“Accept this offering and be with us, Ülgen’s spirits and you, Great Ülgen.”

He turned to the west and said:

“Umai and the spirits of earth and water, help us!” Then, turning to the north, he said:

“Erlik and erlikens, create no hindrances to us!”

Thus, turning in the direction of the sun, he made offerings to the Gods and enlisted their support. Then he prepared a simple meal. He took a fresh

⁴ A distilled alcoholic drink (translator’s note).

flatbread out of his bag, broke it in two and gave half to Saosh Yant. The travellers settled down by the fire and began to eat after saying their prayers. Despite his old age, Kudai Kam didn't even look tired. On the contrary, he seemed to reveal himself and flourish in the energy that emanated from that place. The same, though, couldn't be said about Saosh Yant. The long walk in the mountains was difficult and tiring for him. Although he was trying to keep his chin up, it was obvious that he was exhausted.

"But why are we eating here?" asked Saosh Yant, puzzled. "We had to carry the firewood to the very top of the mountain. We might as well have a meal at the bottom, where there's a lot of firewood in the forest."

Kudai Kam gave him a condescending smile.

"So that the food we eat here could give us the energy of this place and help us enhance the connection with the Ayami. Of course, we could have had a bite much below in the forest. We also could have stayed home and not gone anywhere. But that would take us nowhere since we need the connection with the Ayami. Remember the ritual of bringing food to the graveyards?"

"Of course, I do," shrugged Saosh. "I have always been amazed at the fact. I was even scared when my parents made me eat that food. I always felt that I didn't eat just food, but the deceased himself."

"Exactly! Such rituals are needed to enhance the connection with the ancestors and get their assistance. Nowadays, unfortunately, people have forgotten about the meaning of this ritual. Still, in the past, they used to ask powerful people for help, those who really could be of assistance."

"I'm sorry, Kudai Kam, but is it all right that after the funeral repast, tramps roam about the graveyard, picking up the leftovers and drinking the liquor? I have also seen many times that birds wouldn't mind feasting on the food."

"No, it makes no difference because they sought help not from a powerful person but an ordinary one. And the meaning of the ritual has been forgotten. Now it's just a formality. And the birds' activity is good. They carry the soul of the deceased away into the upper worlds. Some nations even have a tradition of not burying the dead body in the ground but dismembering and placing it on a mountaintop. And if the birds feast on the remains, it means that his soul goes into the Upper World of God Tengri and finds a fortunate destiny."

"And if it's done by animals, not birds?"

"Then the soul goes to the God the animal belongs to."

"How interesting! And what is the altar for? Sacrifices were made here, right?" Saosh Yant pointed to the stone slab.

"Yes," answered Kudai Kam. "The spirits feed on the body's energy, for the blood is the energy of the Kut. When blood is shed, the nether spirits get

their food. And then you can influence them. Placate them so to speak so that they don't harm the living, don't eat them alive through misfortunes, diseases and suffering, which are food for these spirits. To do so, you need to divert them and redirect them to the sacrifice. The spirits will drink the energy released through the sacrificial animal's blood, quiet down and stop making mischief."

"And for how long is it going to help?"

"As long as the spirits are fed, they don't harm people."

"But then they will send woes and misfortunes?"

"Yes. Unfortunately, such things happen in our world all the time. You can see for yourself: wars, diseases, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks are happening now and then. Because the spirits always need food. They exult and rejoice when things like that occur. People used to know this very well. And they made the sacrifices at the right time. Now, this practice has been abandoned. Nobody performs these rituals. That's why all sorts of calamities happen in the world."

"A-a-ah!" drawled the young man. "Now much is becoming clear to me!"

"Besides," the Great Shaman went on, "the sacrificial animal becomes an assistant spirit to the shaman. You see this drum, for example?" asked Kudai Kam, warming the skin of his drum over the fire.

"Yeah, it's a good drum!"

There were overtones of real envy in Saosh Yant's voice.

"It's made of deer skin, which was sacrificed long ago. And now this deer has become my assistant spirit. It helps me when I perform my rituals. It shows me the right direction and takes me to the right place. It knows where I need to go. And I trust it."

"Is it something like GPS navigation?"

"Ah, these are the devices all tourists have now?" grinned Kudai Kam.

"Exactly!"

"Yeah, it's something like that. With the difference that the data has been fed into your navigator in advance and the deer learns everything in real-time."

"How is that?"

"Have you ever seen an animal with a navigator?"

"Ha-ha-ha! Of course not!" laughed Saosh Yant, surprised.

"So my deer knows where to take me."

"But it is dead!"

"So are you! The deer is alive. And its soul serves to me."

The young man pondered for a while.

"But is it right to kill animals?" asked Saosh Yant with doubt.

"The killing itself," said the shaman sagely, "is bad. If a man kills for no reason, just for fun, it's bad. It worsens his destiny. Or if he does so out of spite. It's bad too. Nowadays many people who live in cities go hunting.

This also worsens their destiny.”

“Why?”

“Because if a man is comfortable, he has everything, he isn’t starving, and then there’s no point in killing animals. It’s done just for fun, for the adrenaline rush. All that burdens the destiny of this unfortunate hunter. In the past, people couldn’t survive without it. That was understandable. But now the modern man has everything. He isn’t starving, and on the contrary, he’s got too much money and not enough common sense.”

“Ha, that was well said!” laughed the young man.

“That’s why we should respect nature and everything around us. Besides, many species are going extinct.”

“Tell me, Kudai Kam, is it bad for the animals when they are killed?”

“It is good for them, for they go to a better world. They become free from the suffering in the physical world. Their souls go to the world where there isn’t as much evil and suffering as we have here. But on earth, the needless killing ruins the harmony. And still, we have to make sacrifices. For example, when we don’t have any other food or need to help out kinsmen to drive away the evil spirits. Then it is permissible and doesn’t disrupt the harmony of the world. But only in rare and exceptional cases.” “Ah! Now I understand. Thanks, Kudai Kam.”

“Good. Now you tear off one more band off your shirt. Tie it to the drum to be connected to it and receive the spirits’ assistance.”

He showed the drum handle, carved in the shape of a man. It was dark brown. Where the hand held it, it was much darker. Saosh curiously glanced at what no one had been allowed to see and recoiled involuntarily. The guardian of the drum was looking at him, lifelike.

“It can’t be!” exclaimed the young man in surprise.

“What? You thought it was just a piece of wood? No, my friend. The guardian is alive! More alive than you and me put together! So make sure you handle it with care.”

Saosh Yant made a low bow to the drum, then stood up and tied a kona around the guardian’s neck.

“It is the image of the ancestor shaman who helps me with drumming. There are two types of shamans: the ancestors and the Ayami. When an Ayami is portrayed on the handle, she helps with drumming. Sometimes there can be one more head on the handle, below, or a small man on the belly – that’s the image of the shaman, the owner of the drum.”

The Drumming

The Great Shaman took the drum by the handle, put on the shaman cap with owl feathers and different colorful pendants that covered half the face. Then he stood up, bent down his head and bowed a little as if hiding his

face in the drum. Saosh Yant even thought for a minute that he wanted to hide in it completely.

"When drumming, you need to listen to your drum carefully," said Kudai Kam at last, "in order to clear the mind of every single thought. Do not think up anything like you usually do. Then the true Knowledge will come to you, and you will hear the voices of the ancestors, spirits, and Ayami. Now I'll start drumming, calling upon the Ayami of this place, and you listen carefully and try to grasp everything going on."

He beat the drum abruptly with the stick. The metal pendants echoed to the beat. They were ready for the great ritual. The next instant, the drum came to life. It filled up with new energy and uttered a dull, long-drawn-out sound. Saosh Yant closed his eyes for a moment and suddenly saw a beautiful young deer appears before his master and bow its head before him. Kudai Kam got on the red deer at once, ready for the long journey into the world of the spirits and ancestors.

"I will now start the drumming. My deer will show me the way, and you listen carefully. Pay heed to everything that will be going on. Stop thinking, and, maybe, you'll hear the spirits."

Kudai Kam began to beat the drum abruptly. A shiver went up and down Saosh Yant's spine. Every beat resounded in the drum with a hollow echo, and it seemed to take his soul straight to heaven to the worlds where time doesn't exist. It had stopped at the upper abode and was in no hurry. Where the eternal powerful Gods dwell, gazing at the entire world from the peak of their wisdom and omnipotence, at the people. Wondering at their actions at times, but not interfering in their lives. And where everything becomes possible once you have gotten there. In that instant, Saosh Yant understood that most people DON'T EVEN WANT to get there! That's why their countless requests, complaints and prayers don't reach the Gods. Curses, too. The people cannot stop talking to themselves and getting into these worlds. Even when they pray and ask for something from God, and they keep talking to themselves. And the Gods? They remain in peace and tranquillity. In exceptional cases, shamans only go up before them and humbly ask for something. And they get what they ask for. But how rarely such things happen! How rarely!

In the meantime, Kudai Kam was beating the drum faster and faster. More and more vigorously. As if urging his deer on. Bending to his will, it carried its master at the full career to unknown lands. They were rushing along together, driven only by the soul of the shaman's ecstasy, the Tyn Bura.

Saosh Yant was carefully listening to the sounds of the drum and seemed to be carried away by the deer too. He saw everything that was happening to Kudai Kam. Meanwhile, the shaman started throat-singing and hopping to the beat of the drum. Eventually, he lost himself in vehement drumming, falling into a trance, dancing, at one moment bending down to the ground,

at another jumping high and continuing the throat-singing. He was moving with agility and energy like he was eighteen years old. As though he wasn't a man whose hair was bestrewn with the first snow, but a strong young lad. The same as his apprentice.

Listening to him attentively, Saosh Yant also began to fall into a trance. Vague forms, visions and voices, fragments of words and some long forgotten but so familiar emotions filled the whole of his being. He felt as if he was floating in the ocean of lasting impressions. And he liked it. He sensed that it was to be so. And he blended into this endless torrent.

In the meantime, a strong wind sprung up, ruffling the flame in different directions. The dishevelled tongues, scattering sparks on everything, were saying, "You're here, you're close. Soon you'll know all you wanted to know! Soon! Very soon!" Slowly and smoothly, almost insensibly, a cloud wafted on the mountains. Stealthily, it rose from the bottom, from the cosy and quiet valleys, and gently enveloped the landscape. It happened so fast that before Saosh Yant knew it, he was in the thick, dense mist. Nothing could be seen through it. But that did not worry him at all. He had already reached his destination. Saosh Yant was in some other reality. A familiar face showed out of the mist. It, in some way, resembled the face of the Altai Princess. Beautiful, stern and majestic, it made him tremble even to glance at it. She peered at the young man with her penetrating eyes, and her lips said:

"Expect me! I will come to you in a dream."

To Fall in Love With The Ayami

A, wave of shivers ran up and down the young man's spine. He felt great agitation. And even some strange awe. He went hot and cold all over.

He felt a cold sweat break out on his back. His breathing seized up. Saosh made an enormous effort to inhale. And at that moment, he realized that he was in love with that woman. He was stuck on her! He'd never felt anything like that before. Like many other men, he used to treat women with delicate irony. With sarcasm. Even satirically. He didn't take them seriously. For him, they were weak creatures, unworthy of respect. Now, all was different. He was just bewitched, enchanted by the energy, power and beauty coming from that wonderful woman. Astonished and crushed! He'd never seen such fortitude and fascination with magical beauty. Almost unaware of what he was doing, he replied, "I will be waiting for you. Come!"

With this, the vision of the beautiful woman started fading. It was growing dim by the minute until it completely vanished into nothing. "Where are you?" asked the fascinated young man silently. The answer was silence and void. But despite that, an incredibly strong emotional state remained

in the heart of the young shaman. It echoed that great and deep feeling of touching something miraculous and beautiful. Something was possessing great energy, power, beauty and enchanting feminine magic.

In the meantime, the mischievous vagrant wind, having finished amusing itself with escapades, blew away the shaggy wisps of the bearded clouds and calmed down. The sky was clear again. The sun smiled gently at the mountains. Then, feeling a bit tired, it was setting, going away into its night abode and tinting the snowy peaks with wonderful colours. The soft tinges of pink merged into purple and then crimson. Everything sounded and looked completely different in these rays and had an absolutely different meaning. A great feeling of deepness and penetration into an unfathomable mystery. "Wow!" A half-thought, half-state flashed through Saosh Yant's mind. "I've never thought that the mountains are so beautiful! They are just gorgeous. I've come here for so many years, it seemed that I knew everything here, but now it's like I see this beauty for the first time in my life! Why haven't I seen it before?"

Kudai Kam finished his drumming. The last abrupt beat ceased and vanished into the high sky. There was a very subtle, ringing silence. The Great Shaman made low bows to the four corners of the earth, to all the Gods. Then he put down his drum, sat down and started feeding the fire, which was already starving and eagerly fell upon the dry logs. Saosh Yant also began to wake out of trance little by little. At first, he didn't understand where he was. But soon, he came to his senses and looked around.

"Phew! I'm back here again?" breathed the young man, sitting beside the shaman.

"So, you've seen the Ayami, haven't you?" asked the old man. "Yes, she said she'd come to me in a dream."

"Very good. She accepted you," the kam smiled with approval and patted the apprentice on the shoulder.

"She is so beautiful!" Said Saosh shyly and blushed.

"Of course! And how can she not be? You're lucky. The Ayami of this place is a woman."

"Why, they can be different?" "Yeah. They can..."

"What gender can the Ayami be?" asked Saosh Yant with great curiosity.

"Are they all women? Or not?"

"They can be of feminine or masculine gender. Even neutral sometimes."

"Ah, yes, I heard something like that from my grandfather in my childhood, but I thought it was just fairy-tale stuff. So, it is not, after all?"

"No. It is all for real. Such Ayami appears in the shape of a woman before men and in the shape of a man before women."

"Unbelievable!" "Indeed."

Saosh Yant was silent for a while, pondering over what he'd heard, but

then doubt crept into the young man's soul.

"Tell me, Kudai Kam, is the Ayami of this place really a woman? It wasn't my imagination? Ah?!"

"I see you have a mash on her!" He burst into infectious laughter. "She surely hooked you on! Ah?!"

Kam gave the young man a nudge.

For an answer, Saosh Yant merely hushed up, embarrassed, blushed and lowered his head.

"Don't you worry. She's a woman. And she appeared before you as what she really is."

"..."

"Why don't you say something?"

"You know... I feel kind of awkward... Well... So... I mean... You see..."

"You're in love? Ha-ha-ha!"

Like a thirteen-year-old boy, the Great Shaman roared with ringing and infectious laughter. And his apprentice wished the ground would swallow him up. He was ready to die of shame to not display his feelings. "It's okay."

"But how did you..."

"Don't worry, and I know everything about you. You're in love with her. I saw it when I was drumming."

"But it shouldn't be that way! I've never fallen in love with anyone. I've always thought it was the appanage of the weak. Is it even possible to fall in love with an Ayami?"

"It's possible! Even necessary." "But why?"

"Because it's useful."

"What?!"

"It's useful. When you fall in love with something greater and mightier than you are, something that largely excels you, you rise to higher levels. You become stronger and more powerful."

"But I shouldn't fall in love. I'm not a girl!"

"You're right. Partly. You shouldn't fall in love with somebody weaker, worse and lower than you. Or with a person who is equal in power and spirit. But you easily afford it with a person who is greater than you. All the more so with an Ayami. She will teach you many things."

"Really?"

"Of course. She will share her wisdom, power and knowledge with you. Whether you're a man or woman – that's not so important. It's mere prejudice!"

"Oh, all right then," the young man gave a sigh of relief. "I still can't come to myself."

"Let's go!" Kam grinned with approval. "It's time to leave."

How to Build a Shelter

It was growing dark. The first stars began to light up in the clear, deep blue sky, shrouded below in the scarlet evening glow. The birds were silent, giving way to the lilting songs of the crickets, which impregnated the air with their soft but pleasant trills. Their sounds created an atmosphere of conciliation and peace. Meanwhile, the cold came from the mountain tops. The warm ascending day air changed into the fresh streams that flowed into the valleys. Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant began to go down to the level where trees grew to build a shelter for the overnight stay.

"Have you ever built shelters?" Kudai Kam asked his apprentice. "No, what is it? Some kind of a hut?" he asked simple-heartedly.

"Yeah, to hide from snakes and predators," the shaman laughed in his silvery moustache.

"Oh, no, I haven't. My friends and I have only gone camping. And we lived in tents there."

"Good. See that fallen tree?" "Yes. What shall we do with it?"

"What shall we do? Before doing anything, you must understand something."

"What is that?"

"Night is the time of predators. The forest never sleeps, you see. Life always goes on in it. And at night, while you're asleep, you are doubly defenceless. Vulnerable. You become easy prey for all of them."

"Oh. Who exactly?"

"Bears, in the first place. And wolves."

"Oh, dear!" Saosh was frightened. "So what are we going to do now? Maybe we should go home?"

"No, my friend, it's not the purpose of your journey. We'll spend the night here."

"If you say so, Kudai Kam."

"And do you know what to do, for example, when you wake up in the morning and, say, there is a snake on your chest?"

Saosh thought for a moment. His eyes showed a mix of horror, disgust and fear.

"I don't know." He then braced himself and said, "First, I thought of throwing it off me. But then I understood that as soon as I make it angry, it may bite me."

"Yeah, good!"

"I don't know what to do. Perhaps, I should just lie and do nothing. It will crawl away by itself."

"Excellent! You're right! Good boy! How did you guess?" "I don't know, and I just felt that."

"You are indeed a very capable apprentice shaman." "Does it warm itself

like that or what?"

"Of course. Snakes, you know, are cold-blooded creatures. So, if you don't want to wake up in the morning with a snake on your chest, you do this. Go a little bit up and make a big fire there. We'll make another one right in front of your shelter to keep ourselves warm at night. And to keep off the predators. The fire on the higher ground has to be much bigger than ours."

"All right, but what is it for?"

"When our fire burns down in the morning and gets cold, snakes will come to warm themselves not on your chest, but near the smouldering coals of that fire. Do you understand?"

"Ah! I see! That's great! How do you know about all that, Kudai Kam?"

"What planet are you on?" The old man looked at him reproachfully. "I live in the forest all the time."

"Ah, I see. Well, I'll be going now?"

"No, wait. Now you'll build the shelter. What is important for us?" "What?"

"To make the shelter as soon as possible and with the least possible trouble. Here, chop the longest branches off the fallen spruce. They will make good beams."

Kudai Kam pointed to the tree, whose trunk lay almost parallel to the ground.

Saosh Yant set to work. In the meantime, Kudai Kam found an old dry nest no longer in use and gathered some dead leaves and twigs. He struck the fire steel over the kindling, produced a spark and... a small cheerful fire, slowly but surely, began to eat up the food given to it. Kam blew on the incipient flame, breathed life into it, threw on more dry branches, and the fire was ready. He only needed to feed it up, to put on some thick logs, and a warm, fairly comfortable night was guaranteed for them.

"So? Is the shelter ready?" "It's ready. Here, look!"

The young man proudly pointed to the result of his work. The shelter was a success. Large enough, with a thick floor covering, it was kindly inviting the travellers to come in and stay.

"Not bad. Now, do you remember what else you have to do?"

"Ah, yes! A snake on my chest. I remember, of course. Can I take this firebrand?"

"Yeah, take it. And remember that the fire must be much bigger than ours."

So the young man went a little up, made a big fire, and then returned to the shelter.

Erlik's Servants – The Malevolent Spirits

While laying inside the shelter and listening to the measured crackle of the fire, Kudai Kam began to explain to Saosh Yant

"It's very important to sleep in place of Power, be it a burial mould, an ancient temple complex, an ancient observatory, or the cave of a saint. There is a special energy that impregnates the place. A person throws off the barriers of perception while sleeping, and the master of the place can come to them, imparting knowledge. Tonight you'll get this invaluable experience. I can see that you're ready."

"Will I meet with Her?" asked the young man, a little embarrassed.

"You're itching to see Her, eh?" grinned the white-haired shaman. "Maybe, you will...."

"Please tell me why Tengri created the evil spirits," Saosh Yant asked to alleviate the discomfort.

"The evil spirits are Erlik's servants," answered Kudai Kam, "because there is not only created in the world, but destruction as well. They are in charge of the process of destruction. Without it, the world would be one-sided and incomplete. Where there is birth, there must also be death and destruction. This creates the necessary experience that the soul gets here, without which its wisdom would be incomplete. Tengri's creation wouldn't be finished or integral without it. If there's good, there must also be evil. If there is heaven, there is the earth. If there is something light, there must be something heavy. This is what the completeness of reality is."

"And are these spirits always evil?" wondered Saosh Yant.

"No, they are just playing this role temporarily. Like a gnat or a mosquito," said Kudai Kam, flicking a twig at the mosquitoes which had come out at sunset and were now swarming around with a bothering hum, disturbing the rest of the travellers.

"Yes, these parasites are so annoying! There's no getting away from them!"

"A mosquito will be disincarnate some day and will live in heaven, leaving behind its role of a blood-sucker."

"It'll have a little rest?" laughed the young man.

"Yes! All of this is the great design of the God Tengri, where each actor is needed to make this drama complete. Be the 'nice' or 'bad', 'good' or 'evil', and they are needed for the completeness of reality. No matter how desperately we want to, we cannot escape it."

"But what is the reason for all of this?"

"If everything in this world were just good, positive and pleasant, the souls of the living wouldn't get the necessary experience."

"Are the spirits of illnesses created by Erlik too?"

"Of course! Without them, people wouldn't have known the experience that the Maker wants them to have."

"But it's bad!" persisted the young man.

"The phenomenon itself isn't bad, and it's the people's ATTITUDE to it that becomes bad. If they consider the evil that falls to their lot as the trial of

their Power and Spirit, they will be tolerant and wise, and God will be pleased with them. Their souls will gain the necessary experience.”

Saosh became thoughtful and fell silent.

“When a child knocks against a chair, and they get hurt. They start crying, and the parents say, ‘Tut-tut! What a bad chair! Bad! Very bad! Give it a nice smack!’ ”

That’s funny!” Saosh laughed heartily. “My niece would hit the chairs like that when she was little. She would get more lumps from hitting the chairs back, and there was so much whining!!! She did this until she understood that messing with the chairs is dangerous.”

“Wise parents would say, ‘You know, sweetie,’ in the world where you live, there are many sharp corners you can run into. They aren’t good, and they aren’t bad. They just are there. You should be careful, so you don’t hurt yourself.”

“Such parents would be very wise! They should also explain that it’s dangerous to poke your fingers into the electrical socket and put all sorts of nasty things in your mouth. My parents forbid me to do such things, and I did them just to spite them. I shocked myself with sockets and fell down from numerous places, like garages and roofs. I tasted all kinds of garbage. Got poisoned. And I survived.”

“See? You had some experiences. The same things happen here. Instead of ‘chairs’, ‘roofs’ and ‘sockets’ we have malevolent spirits manifesting as illnesses, losses, bad luck and troubles.”

“And instead of ‘parents’, we have shamans?” Saosh Yant brightened with his guess. “Am I right? Shamans?!”

“Yes, my friend! That’s right.”

“And you help people to cope with these scoundrels?”

“Yes, we do. What’s more, we teach them what they should and should not do to avoid getting into trouble. We teach them how to behave in this complicated world.”

“It’s a pity that people have forgotten this nowadays.”

“They will suffer the consequences of forgetting. The Earth is rocking like a cradle now, and we must be on time.”

“In time for what?” asked the young man. He suddenly felt an irresistible drowsiness come over him. His eyes became slumberous, his body feeble. He could hardly keep his eyes open. He tried to cast away the shroud of sleep. Still, he felt some mysterious Power overcome him and fell into oblivion...

Armageddon

Saosh Yant slept uneasily that night. He was constantly tossing and

turning. His mind drifted somewhere between sleep and waking. The young shaman dreamt of unbridled volcanoes that had awoken from their slumber and were destroying everything. The rivers of burning lava flowed everywhere, incinerating all that was in their path. Helpless insects, animals, people, houses, all the achievements of the “advanced civilization”, were burning in the violent and sizzling lava flows. There was such a terrible stench as if the inferno of Hell had swept down upon the earth. What was not destroyed by the volcanoes was easily levelled by the earthquakes. High-rise buildings and skyscrapers collapsed instantly like houses of cards. The unfortunate people tried scurrying here and there, not realizing that their lives were imminently about to expire. Small children, old people, men, women, innocent babies, and animals were equally defenceless before the raging elements. The heat was so scorching that the Arctic Ocean and Antarctica glaciers and the permafrost began to melt. Gigantic bubbles of underground gases rose from beneath the surface, breaking huge open holes in the earth. The oceans overflowed. Innumerable tsunamis slammed into defenceless cities.

He saw a huge flood that was inundating everything and sparing no one. The water in the oceans was one hundred meters higher. The flood didn’t stop until almost all the land was submerged. Some of the high-rise buildings that were spared by the flood stood towering over the boundless surface of the water. People rushed to the upper floors of these buildings– everything indicated that Dooms day had arrived.

The large metropolises and coastal towns were the first to perish, followed by other parts of the land. It continued until there were only small islands of life left in the Altai Mountains, the Tian Shan and Tibet.

“What’s going on? Where am I?” cried Saosh Yant, horrified.

“It’s the future of the earth,” answered a familiar feminine voice behind his back.

He spun round.

“Of course! How could I forget you?! Ayami!”

Saosh looked with awe at her beautiful, stern, and determined face.

“Behold!” she said. “There is a reason for all this. People have called the wrath of the spirits of these places. They haven’t appreciated what nature gives them, they haven’t taken care of it, and a terrible fate awaits them. They have earned this.”

“But why?!” exclaimed the young man in despair.

“Because they have lived for the moment and have never thought of the earth’s future.”

“What is to be done?”

“Their salvation is in turning to nature, to the places of Power, so that people can find inner harmony with the help of the Spirits of Light in Nature. Follow me!”

Saosh followed, and they flew over the hoary spires of the Altai Mountains and descended into a valley. There was a river flowing nearby. The soil had vegetation, though it was scant. The surface of the earth was even. Unscalable mountain ranges and white peaks surrounded it.

"Where are we?" asked Saosh, looking around.

"This is where you need to set up an ecovillage," she said sternly. "Where people will find salvation from Armageddon. You must warn everyone who is still able to hear and understand the gravity of the situation. There is no time to lose. After that, people will reunite with nature, harmony and love for all of the earth here. In this way, they will find salvation."

"All right, but...."

Saosh didn't have time to finish.

"There will no longer be a civilization," said the Ayami.

"What about the people?"

"They have to learn to live in the wild. Those who won't learn to do this will be doomed to extinction."

Having said this, the beautiful and proud woman vanished into thin air.

The Shamans' Philosophy

When they woke up in the morning, they decided to go down into the valley to wash in the river and cook breakfast there. The sky was overcast, and the mountain peaks could not be seen. There was no trace of the splendour that had delighted their eyes the day before. The landscape was enveloped in thick milky fog, and it was drizzling. You could not see past your arm, and it was dangerous to go further. Even wild animals prefer not to go anywhere in such foul weather. Goats, wild boars and even domestic cows that had gotten the crazy idea to travel now stood bunched together, waiting for the weather to improve. Our travellers continued their journey along the bank of the brook. Saosh Yant wasn't afraid because he knew that he could face anything with such a mighty and powerful shaman as Kudai Kam. Having reached the brook with the crystal clear spring water, they had a drink and began to follow it down to the river. The brook was cheerfully babbling its song of Eternity, glistening on the stones with its pearly trickles. The water roared constantly. It emanated a fresh and pleasing aroma. The bank was uneven and rocky. While walking on it, the young man had to be watchful and cautious. He looked at Kudai Kam and suddenly saw that he was walking easily and carelessly, in a very matter-of-fact way. He was old enough to be the young man's grandfather. Saosh Yant couldn't contain himself any longer, and he broke the silence.

"Tell me, Kudai Kam, how can you be walking so calmly and easily? The

path here is the devil to pay!"

"Stop! Do not take his name in vain!"

Saosh fell silent.

"I have lived in this way since my childhood. This is not difficult to me."

"Then I shall get good at this as well."

The young man was silent for a while and then asked the shaman:

"Tell me something, Kudai Kam. One day when we were talking, you mentioned geocentrism. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to ask you what you meant by that."

"It means," answered Kudai Kam, "when a person lives on earth and thinks that is the Navel of the World. They measure everything by the earthly yardstick. It's no wonder, for everyone is conditioned by their first impressions. A person perceives the rest of the world through the lens of these impressions, in their own sight. The physical world is very small compared to the world of the ancestors, and even more so with the spirit world. Life on earth is an exception to the general rule. It is gruesome to look at it – even animals eat one another here. The same happens amongst people. Only they do not eat each other physically, but economically and morally. They rise in the estimation of the crowd by dragging someone else through the mud. One might have the impression that the devil rules this world, and that there's only one way out – to die as soon as possible. Since I have been to heaven, I can tell you that you don't find horrors like these anywhere else. Most of the malevolent spirits live near the earth. The earth is a particularly difficult place in which the soul can get the experience that it cannot find anywhere else. These experiences make it more mature and helps it to know the value of good and evil."

"Yes. This is undoubtedly true!"

"There's no doubt about it. The shamans on earth have always been oppressed. First, the lamaists (Buddhists) set the khans against the shamans, and they burnt them alive. Although the strongest ones flew out of the yurts and didn't burn. Then Burkhanists did the same. Then we were demonized and considered evil by Christians. Muslims killed us too. Communists shot us and threw us into labour camps. The current government is trying to smear us in every possible way. We are dissident in their view because we prevent their ideology from becoming the only ideology. They want people to obey and not dare to think independently, or worse yet, to listen to shamans. This is egocentrism or geocentrism, when a person sees everything in a limited way – from the perspective of the earthly existence, thinking that it is the only standard of perception. They think that people everywhere live as blindly, wretchedly and monstrously as they do here.

That there is only the physical world with its laws. Because of this way of thinking, and the earth is on the brink of a catastrophe. They want to destroy all the dissidents in the same way that they destroyed Christ. To defame them in the crowd's perception, as they did to Christ. In this way, they will make people afraid of freedom."

They returned home, walking on the fallen brown needles and the soft green moss that lay like a large thick carpet between the larches. The journey was going to be long, so they were going at an easy pace. Getting around the large and mysterious boulders covered with bushy moss, they came to a great mountain river carrying its rapid waters from the mountain tops into the valley. The air was slowly warming the morning and began to rise lazily, pulling the hoary blanket of the fog off the river. The morning gloom finally dispersed, and the bright sun broke through, casting its rays onto the landscape. The world began to play with bright specks of light, and the colours became rich and vivid. The bright green moss, the soft grass, the dazzling blue sky with the wisps of white clouds, and even the grey rocks breathed in a fresh new way. Everything sounded differently like there had been no bad weather. The day was rejoicing, and the birds were singing. The view of the restless and majestic river from the steep shore was wonderful.

Walking beside Kudai Kam, Saosh Yant kept thinking about what the shaman had said. And finally, he asked:

"I've been thinking. Is there a way for the earth to escape all this? If you live with the thought that you can't change anything, you get kind of... terrified!"

"Yes, there is a way out," nodded the Great Kam. "If people turn to heaven and nurture love inside themselves if they start living not by the earthly laws, but by the laws of God, they will be able to spiritualize both themselves and the world around them. This possibility was given to them by Tengri. All the prophets and all of the religions have spoken of this. Many people are lost and deaf to this calling. They are unwilling to part with the sordid nature, which makes them suffer. When people are willing to really think about their existence, they will be able to overcome all of this!"

The Raging Tourist Ukok Plateau

A group of tourists was headed for Belukha Mountain in late July. The heat was pleasant and warm to the bone. The wind was blowing on the travellers' faces, making their journey easier and more enjoyable.

They were a mixed group of varying ages. Semyonich and Valentina were a middle-aged couple that spearheaded this difficult tour. Semyonich was

tall and wiry with dark blond hair. They had been to these places many times and knew all the paths and trails well. Kirill and Maksim were their two young assistants that had accompanied them on many of these difficult trips before. Kirill was a slender, blue-eyed, fair-haired student with glasses. Maksim was known to his fellow travellers as the "prom king" the son of Semyonich and Valentina. The two girls in the group were Kristina and Vera. Kristina was frail, lean, with a boyish haircut and beautiful dark blue eyes. Vera was a real beauty with dark blond hair, a pleasant smile and dimples on her cheeks. These joyous and lively girls were the life and soul of the group. Everyone enjoyed their jolly laughter. Sergei rounded out the group. He was a taciturn man of thirty, dark-haired, with a muscular and athletic body. Sergei had been on several tours before, but this was his first time going to Belukha.

The nature was feral, severe and unforgiving. Even in August, the rivers were full and rapid. Many of the cars that carried the tourists there ended up hood deep in the river or stuck to the muddy, miry bottom. From seemingly nowhere, the bogs that appeared in these mountains were deceitful and dangerous. One could easily drive a car into them axle-deep and sink. And there was absolutely nothing to hook a winch cable on to pull yourself out, no stone, no shrub. It was a big quagmire where you got the distinct feeling that "running to the nearest village for a tractor to drag your car out" was not going to happen. The nearest village was at least forty miles away. The locals weren't always willing to help these unlucky tourists. And if it was harvest season, no one had the time to help them, no matter how much money they would offer. Tourists venturing into this area were on their own and needed to be self-reliant.

One could encounter many wild animals here. A herd of wild goats would pass by, and then a wolf would run stealthily along in the distance. Sometimes Bruin, the king of the beasts, appeared at the tops of the mountains.

Every now and then, a hawk would circle high in the sky. Snakes sunned themselves on the rocks. Everything here made it clear that one wrong move, one little mistake, could cost a person their life.

They finally arrived around midday at the Altai Princess's tomb on the Ukok Plateau. The once majestic barrow was now a pile of scattered stones. It was a pitiful sight, an echo of its former greatness. The travellers threw their backpacks off their tired shoulders and came closer. They raised their hands with a praying gesture and bowed with reverence to this sacred place.

The Ignorant Macho

Sergei was standing behind the company in his dreariness, unwilling to join them.

"Serge, why are you standing there all alone? Come to us," Valentina called to him amiably.

He came closer and pertly asked:

"What? Must I bow to these rocks now?!"

"Not to the rocks, but to the ghost of the Altai Princess. She blesses everyone for travelling further. She brings good luck in journeys," explained Semyonich patiently.

"What a load of crap! What Princess? These are just bogus stories made up by morons. Unscientific nonsense!"

"You're wrong!" Semyonich lowered his head with displeasure. "The Princess feels everything. The spirits of this place and her ghost may avenge that. It's wrong to disturb the dead."

"There's nothing left here. Everything has been taken by science nerds wearing glasses."

"All the more reason that you shouldn't disturb this place. The spirits won't like it. They may avenge this, and the Princess will be displeased with you." "You don't say!"

"She has led many people astray who showed disrespect to her and desecrated her tomb, and they got very lost."

"Yeah, whatever."

"Take the story about the excavations, for example. She punished the people for disturbing her remains. Don't you remember that severe earthquake?" "Just a coincidence."

"Then why did it happen at the exact time when they were in her tomb?"

"That's why it's called a coincidence," snarled Sergei.

"All right, and why, when a similar tomb was excavated in China, was there a wave of earthquakes which continuously convulsed that region? And now there are large quakes across China almost every year since."

"Cause there are mountains there. And where there are mountains, quakes will happen too," replied the sorry excuse for a geologist.

"It's useless talking to you," said Semyonich vexedly, making a helpless gesture.

"So then don't talk to me. I am not forcing you," he snapped pertly. "I'd better go see what the smartass grave robbers might have missed."

With these words, the stubborn man walked to the remains of the burial mound. Then, stepping onto the stones, he carefully looked at the ground under his feet.

"Sergei, don't do it. It's dangerous," Valentina tried to discourage him.

"If ever I needed a woman's advice, I would surely ask you. But for now..."

Excuse me!"

"I can excuse you, and it won't be the first time I'm dealing with an idiot like you. The Princess, however, will not excuse you."

"We'll see about that. You think you know so much!" Valentina simply waved her hand at him.

Sergei stooped down, picked up a boulder and then threw it aside. He picked up another and then another.

"Don't do it. Stop before it's too late," Kirill exhorted him. "Calm down, son. I know what I'm doing."

The vandal continued with his search. He kept throwing rocks aside in his attempt to find something. He even tried to pick at the soil with his ice axe. He found nothing but stones and earth. He went on in this way for about an hour.

The group was watching his "exploits" with reproof. At last, quite drained and exhausted, he made a vexed gesture and nonchalantly remarked: "Damn diggers picked this place clean. Damn these Novosiberians. Smart ass, sons of bitches! They could have left at least something for us ordinary mortals. But no, it's always for them, everything for their good selves! They artfully use science as a cover, and I'm telling you. They don't fool me!"

"You should be grateful that you're safe and sound, " Vera said, lowering her voice.

"Ah, what a load of crap," he waved this notion aside, sat down on a rock and lit up a cigarette. "There's one thing I can't figure out: why some people get everything and others get nothing. Why is this?"

Everyone exchanged puzzled glances. At this point, the travellers understood there was no use in talking to him and kept silent. So he continued talking to himself, just thinking aloud.

"It's no matter, and there are still grave sites in the Altai that will have something of interest. I've heard this from many people. One of these days, I'll head up there and try my luck. These nerds aren't better than me. Maybe I will find something useful to science?! Rumour has it that they thawed the Princess out of the permafrost with boiling water. And they call that a caring attitude to objects of scientific interest! It's for the birds! And if I find a decent grave site, I'll be rich till the end of my days. Just you wait! I'll show all of you!" Carelessly dropping the cigarette butt to the ground, the madman gazed defiantly at his companions.

"Why are you looking at me like that? You think I'm bad, don't you?!" Their answer was stern silence.

"Ah, screw you! Think whatever you like." "Time to go," said Semyonich.

"Aw, damn, I haven't had any rest."

"No one forced you to move all those rocks. We need to find a good place to stay for the night before the sun sets and there isn't much time left.

Sorry, buddy."

"All right, I'll just deal with it. I don't mind," he snapped out with displeasure. Loading himself with his backpack, he shouted crossly at the girls:

"Don't stand about! Shoulder those backpacks, chop-chop!"

They giggled awkwardly but didn't answer him. The entire group got ready and set off.

Tourist Stories, Or Life as It is

As the day gets longer, the unbearable brightness of the sun diminishes and stops scorching everything mercilessly. The heat lowers to a pleasant and mild warmth, signalling the time to prepare for the night. One would think there are still hours until sunset, which is misleading. The sun goes down quickly in the mountains, and dusk descends much faster than it does in flat terrain. Having gone a little bit off the route, they decided to make camp for the night. A brook murmured welcomingly in the cozy and quiet valley, inviting the tired travellers to have a rest and enjoy its hospitality.

"Phew! We can rest at last," sighed the girls tiredly, throwing the huge backpacks off their slender shoulders.

"It's okay," Semyonich said to cheer them up, "the first day is always the most difficult. But, after a while, you get used to it and begin to enjoy it. You will start longing for hiking, for the wild. You'll be totally hooked on all of this. Okay, ladies, take out the food. Here is a fallen tree. Break off some branches and make a fire. I'll go get some logs."

The girls set to work. The men began to put up the tents.

"Oh, yes," agreed Valentina, a beautiful and stately woman, "when he would go off alone without me, I always thought, 'Why on earth would he want to go there, to those mountains? Will he come back alive?' I worried about him a lot."

"But why?" wondered Kristina.

"Oh, he would always tell me these stories," she said with a wave of her hand.

"What kind of stories? Tell us!" chirped the girls in unison.

"Different ones. Here's one of them. It happened in the Caucasus. They were camping and had stopped for the night. Then, in the morning, they had some uninvited guests."

"What guests?" said Vera.

"This was during the Soviet times. They heard the patter of hoofs outside their tents. My husband thought, 'Must be a dream.' The patter drew closer and stopped right outside the tent. Then he heard someone beating a whip.

‘What the hell?’ thought my husband. ‘Who’s come to see us?’ A voice called out in broken Russian, ‘Any men here?’ No reply. “Men in there, COME OUT NOW!” All the men in the tent were only wearing their swimming trunks. Still no answer. Another command, ‘YOU MEN COME OUT NOW!’ Since no one else dared to show themselves, only my husband came out. It had snowed that night before, and the frost was refreshing. The sun was shining right in his face. He was wearing only his swimming trunks, barefoot and unarmed. He came out for a ‘talk’ and saw that there were seven of them. Each of the visitors had a sawn-off shotgun and a sabre on their belts. He stood there looking at them, thinking feverishly, ‘What the hell should I do? What do they want from us?’ One of them waved the whip at him, which made him furious and ready to leap at the man with his bare hands. Suddenly, the intruders just fled, leaving my husband standing there, not understanding what had happened. Then he heard the roar of engines. It turned out that there were several GAZ-66 trucks coming. Φ A geological party had arrived in a very timely manner, so the intruders fled while the going was good. My husband let out of sigh of relief. The geologists got out of the trucks and asked laughingly, ‘Why did you come out almost naked?’ He just stood there, unable to utter a word.”

“Oh, dear!” the mouths of the young listeners fell open. “But what did they want?”

“What do you think?” parried Valentina. “Any ideas?”

The girls fell silent, thinking. Then, all at once, they grew pale. “Oh, dear!” they exchanged glances.

“Yes! These kind of ‘things’ can happen. I said to him, ‘Did you have to try to be so tough?! You were lucky it turned out okay! You thought they couldn’t handle it without you, didn’t you?’ And he just laughed in reply, and I am a MAN!” This is the answer that I get after trying to explain something to him! Testosterone! Damned testosterone! Each time he told me one of these stories, I nearly turned grey listening to them. Then one day, I boldly and desperately decided to just go with him.”

“So then what” the girls laughed merrily. “That was it! I got hooked!”

Valentina gave a happy and joyful laugh imbued with freedom, ease and genuine bliss.

“So one thing led to another,” she went on. “I started going with him all the time, though he didn’t take me on the really difficult trips to the mountains.”

“And rightly so,” Semyonich growled, throwing some freshly chopped wood on the fire. “That’s not a place for a woman.”

“Right you are,” she laughed. “Which reminds me of when I was pregnant with Maksimka on maternity leave. When our son was grown enough, I would leave him with granny. ‘Cause, there’s no compromise when it

comes to hiking. Then when Maksim was old enough, he started asking to come along. I remember when he was five, he'd say, 'I am a man. I'll stand up for you, Mom. I am ready to go hiking now.'"

The girls laughed at the joke in unison.

"He has grown into a real Apollo now!" the woman nodded to where her son stood, working hard to set up the camp with the others.

The girls lowered their eyes, embarrassed. They both liked Maksim. He was handsome, fair-haired, and single too...

"I know what you are thinking," Valentina said, winking at them.

The girls exchanged cheerful glances and then felt embarrassed again.

In this nonchalant way, the tourists built a fire and put the cauldron on. The men set up the camp as the women started cooking the meal. Soon the first delicious smell of food began to fill their nostrils, exciting their appetite and inviting everyone to dinner.

"Valya, everything ready?" Semyonich asked, his belly rumbling. "A little longer. It's still cooking," his wife checked him patiently. If it's hot, it's cooked. Valya, let's start eating." 'Not if the meat is half-cooked. Be patient.' "What's the big deal?"

"You're the one who insisted on bringing fresh meat. Now be patient, will you?"

"Valya, I'm starving."

"Eat now, and you'll be feeding tapeworms for the rest of your life," Valentina hushed.

"All right, forget it," Semyonich conceded with a wave of his hand.

He sat down and mused, tiredly wiping sweat off his forehead. He glanced to the side and what he saw grabbed his attention completely...

Something Weird, Or 'We are not Alone.'

Above the path and away from the campsite, a strange tree could be seen. It was big. Huge even. It stood alone, impossible to miss. There were some weird items hanging off the tree. Semyonich strained his eyes, trying to understand what exactly was hanging there. He couldn't quite make out what it was.

He got up and took a few steps forward, and he still couldn't see. "Ladies, stay here while we go check this tree out."

The women exchanged puzzled looks and decided not to argue.

"Hey fellas, how is it going?" he called to the men who were working on setting up the camp.

"Everything is ready," answered Kirill.

"Excellent, then come with me. I've spotted something interesting." "Where?"

"Over there on the hill. That tree's kinda weird. Can you see it?" "I think so. Yeah. Something is hanging there. What is that?"

"Some tourists must've left their trash there," answered Sergei. "To celebrate the end of their hike."

"I'd like to know what it is."

All the men roused themselves. The ancient and luring instinct for discovery had been triggered.

"So would I," echoed Semyonich. "Let's go?" "All right, let's go!"

All the men from the group directed their steps to the strange and unusual tree.

Insult to the Sanctuary

Cshaman tree with a wide crown, hung with old broken limbing higher, they bumped into something very strange. A huge shamanic objects saluted them. What caught their eyes first was a shamanic leather costume – manzhak. It consisted of pants, high boots and a very long garment covering the knees. The leather was worn-out and dull, ashy, ocher-coloured. The leather costume, covered with ritual drawings, decorated with bells, metal plates, various figures of animals, fringes and even jingle bells, looked like a live creature. It seemed that the owner of the costume was somewhere near, watching the uninvited guests. The tambourine, torn apart, hung there too. It was big, half the height of a human, crowned with nine little "horns" along the edge of the shell and ornamented with shamanic symbols – it was alive too. It would have been alive if it didn't have a huge crack, cutting it apart in the middle. It was as if the crack was saying: "The master left and let the deer out of his tambourine. The tambourine is torn and hung on the shaman's tree with the rest of the Kama's things. Their souls are in better worlds now! They are soaring high and free!"

The men examined the unusual tree carefully. There was also a kyamla – a tambourine's everlasting companionship. One can't do without it.

A tambourine won't sing without it. Kyamla had a dark brown handle, polished by hours and hours of shamanic journey ; tiny magic rings and a picture of a lizard. All of it was so irresistible, so mesmerizing! There were a few bird calls, a Jew's harp, small leather bags, and many other magic objects, the purpose of which was unknown.

There was also a strange construction a few meters away from the shaman tree. A wooden shed, built on four tall trees, formed a rectangle. It was placed very high – a human wouldn't reach it.

"What is it?" the men shrugged, puzzled. "This is a shaman, arkansas", Semyonich said. "What?" asked his companions again.

"An arkansas. A ritual burial place. "What do you mean?"

"It is literally a burial place. This is how they traditionally bury shamans. They don't bury them underground, as it is customary among ordinary people. They put them high above the ground instead, to make it easier for them to reach the Upper world and free their soul".

Sergey glanced at him mistrustfully.

"How do you know that?" he said nonchalantly. "I just know. It's not the first time I have visited these places. I know quite a lot, brother".

"So what do you want to say? Are there shaman's bones up there?" Sergey even whistled.

"Most probably, yes" Semyonich lowered his voice. "To be honest, I have not the slightest desire to go up and check". The group leader's voice sounded like a warning.

"I don't give a damn about this medieval nonsense of yours," said Sergey with an intended disrespect. "I'm going to be a shaman myself, right now". "Don't you dare do it!" his friends tried admonishing him. "It's too dangerous. It can turn nasty for you and all of us".

"Nasty? Ha-ha!" sneered the crazy man. "I'm gonna check it. Who wants to join?"

Silence overtook the group.

"So? No volunteers? There are no real men these days. Screw you! I'll show you what it means to be a shaman. What's this?"

He took a long stick, came up to the shaman tree, hooked up the shaman ritual costume – the manzhak – and took it off the branches with great difficulty.

"Wait, Sergey, come to your senses!" Semyonich was trying to make him listen to reason. "It's dangerous! Spirits won't forgive you!"

"Sure, spirits. I knew some "spirits"⁵ in the army. Never took me too long to handle them, so it won't now either. Come one, let's have a look".

"You are insane! Stop it, now!"

"Sure, sure!" Sergey put the shaman costume on. "Jeez, so heavy. I wonder how many kilos of iron they use for it. Street bums would be happy if they found it. So would scrap collectors. Or how about a folk museum? How much money do you think they would give for it? I could get rich quick. I'll think of it next time when I come back here light-handed, ha-ha! Today my backpack is packed to capacity. What a pity! Next time I'll have a nice conversation with these spirits".

The group was watching his "performance" with resentment. "Here it is! Let's try the hat on!"

He clumsily pulled on the headwear with horns. It slipped down over his eyes, the horns outbalanced, and he almost dropped it.

⁵ A military slang word in Russian scratched used for soldiers who have only been in the army for the first couple of months and "not respected" yet.

"I wish I could walk around like this all the time" he kept on grimacing, arranging the shaman's headwear. "Do I look good? Massive, huh? I'll poke you with my horns if you disagree!"

"Sergey, don't you understand? Shamanic places are sacred. We should respect them," Kirill tried again.

"I understand it very well, so respect me!" The crazy man started to sneer again. "I'm the shaman now. Would you like me to be a shaman? What? Ain't got the guts? Well, I've got it! Ok, let's go on.

He started to tear the shamanic objects off the tree again, blatantly.

"A Jaw's harp? No," he dropped it down. "A bird call? Bullshit. But what is this for?" He tore off a leather bag.

"Let's see what we have here," he scoffed at it. "Oops, nothing in here. What a shame!"

"Sergey, stop before it's too late!" shouted Semyonich.

"Wait, my friend, wait, I've only started. But all this stuff is not what I need, and he shook his head. "Ah yes! A tambourine! Nobody can be a shaman without a tambourine!"

He hooked the tambourine with the stick and picked it.

"It's a bit torn, but it's ok. I'm not picky. I'll play the torn one.

He started to grimace, pretending to be a shaman, hit the tambourine with his hand and sang in an ugly voice with a twang:

"Hey, everyone, come to me, cows, wolves. I'll heal you all. I'm an Altai Eskimos; I've got many-many herbs. Come on, smoke a joint with me, and I promise you'll be free. Hey ya, hey ya! Can't get anything! Hey ya! Hey ya! Come over, everyone!

Everyone was watching his absurd and dangerous performance in complete silence, reproachfully. But he wasn't upset about it all. On the contrary, he seemed to be very satisfied with it. This silent disapproval seemed to make him even more excited.

"Ough! I'm really sweating in this clothing. How the hell are they wearing it? Do they do their shamanic things only in the wintertime? Damn it".

He took off the manzhak and the shaman hat and threw them on the ground.

"What the hell? Is it some kind of Hut on chicken legs or what?" He approached the arkansas.

"Sergey, don't!" cautioned Semyonich. "Will do, buddy will do!"

"This is very dangerous!" said Kirill. "You are just scared!"

"Spirits won't forgive you this!"

"Yeah, man, now I'm really frightened".

Even though everyone tried to talk him out of it, he still decided to reach the arkansas. He quickly climbed up the tree, stood on the arkansas and froze there for a second.

"Here they are! Little bones of the great shaman," He said with a twang

again and took two hipbones. He looked down at his friends, crossed them in front of his chest and shouted out loud:

“Danger! Keep out! Ha-ha!” and started dancing on the arkansas without waiting for a reply. At that very moment, the whole nature shuddered, came alive and... darkened. Cold, gloomy clouds shrouded the sky. They could feel the cold wind coming from the lowlands and piercing their clothes. The wind cried and whimpered in the trees, shaking the arkansas. It started to drizzle mournfully, depressingly. The entire mood of nature had changed; everything was sharp and severe now as if the spirit of the Great Kama himself came before the eyes of the violator of the sanctuary and made his voice heard. The dry branches on the arkansas cracked. The ill wisher swayed and nearly fell down.

“Well, it’s not so nice here anymore”, he backed off a bit. “Anyway, time to go”.

He put the bones back to the arkansas and started to climb down, embracing the tree with both arms and legs.

“Had enough fun, you idiot?” Semyonich gave him a slap upside the head.

“Hey! Don’t touch me, man!”

“Don’t you see? The weather is already getting worse because of you”.

“Bullshit! Just a coincidence”, he waived it.

“Coincidence? You are an idiot indeed. Pray you will get away with it so easily”.

“It’s a good idea!” he raised his finger, excited. “I should take away some shamanic stuff to pray better, right?”

“Come on, don’t be silly. Let’s go. We shouldn’t have even brought you here”. Semyonich was ready to burst.

“You should have, man, you should have. Ok, get going. I’ll catch up with you in a minute”.

The group started walking. Everyone was rushing away from this place; everyone wanted to reach their warm cosy tents and hide from the piercing wind and stinging, bristling rain. The weak-minded tourist took advantage of the opportunity “not to be seen” and picked some magic objects. He hid them in his backpack and came back to the camp unnoticed.

The Night Before Hiking

There was a nasty turn in the weather the following night. Heavy clouds obscured the sky. The rainstorm started early in the evening; the fellow travellers didn’t even have enough time to sit around the fire, finish their tea and sing their favourite songs. Having scared everyone away to their

tents, the rough weather didn't calm down. A strong wind rose and fluttered the tents, howling and moaning, keeping everyone anxious and awake. Everyone had the overwhelming feeling of being punished by nature for disrupting the peace of the sacred place. The local spirits got furious. It was revenge both for the man who insulted the sanctuary and for those who didn't stop him, turning a blind eye to the barbaric act.

Kirill, who shared a tent with Sergey, couldn't fall asleep that night. Neither could Sergey.

"You're not sleeping, are you?" he asked.

"No, I can't fall asleep for some reason," muttered Sergey indistinctly. "I told you you shouldn't have done it to the sacred place".

"Stop it, please. I didn't do anything. Just played the tambourine a bit. "You played a bit! Now nature's playing us!" Kirill started to get angry. "Don't make it a big deal! The weather is always unpredictable in the mountains! Everything can change anytime! What's wrong with you?!" "Not with me. With you. There's something wrong with you. Don't you understand?"

"Ah, damn it. Let's sleep", waived, Sergey and turned away.

At that very moment, they heard a strange groaning sound outside. It was a sound of a dying tree. Before a tree falls, it always makes this last sound – a long, sad, dismal creak – as if saying, "Farewell, life! I've had my day!" Then, a second later, there was a deafening noise of the tree crown falling on the ground.

The guys rushed out of the tent at once.

"Here you go! Do you believe me now?" shouted Kirill, not trying to control his anger anymore. "Don't you see what you did with your dances on the arkansas? You still can't get it, asshole?"

The hapless shaman looked at the huge larch, perplexed. It fell just a couple of meters from their tent.

"What? Nothing to say now?" "Yes..." Sergey said indistinctly.

"Just"yes ``? Nothing else to say? What if this tree killed us, idiot?" Riveted to the spot where he stood, Sergey was staring at the gigantic tree blankly. It was the first moment when frightened to death, he realised what he had done.

"Well, I guess I messed up" he scratched the back of his head. "Wow, you are finally using your brain! Fucking shaman!" "What do I do now?"

"What can you do? Go to bed. And don't try to be original anymore, stupid clown. Got it?"

Sergey went back to the tent without saying a word. His friend followed him too.

He slept restlessly, tossing and turning until dawn. Something was persistently pulling the ripped sleep cover off him, stubbornly keeping him awake. During short blackouts, he saw strange dreams or, rather, hallucinations. Once he saw a huge beautiful deer with wide branching

antlers. It was standing on a forest path, looking at him gently, with a slight reproach. A wolverine was scurrying back and forth, smelling around, causing tiredness and frustration. The oppressive feeling of anxiety and an endless fuss kept him half-awake. Sometimes the dreamer saw a hawk flying above his head, clinging to its prey with its claws. The visions haunted him for the whole night. Time warped. Time became elastic. There seemed to be no end to it. Sergey sighed heavily, turned again and again, and the dreams went on. It felt like forever.

He had a strong vision early in the morning. There came a powerful strike of a tambourine among the blind darkness, a sound that made the entire space, from earth to moon, convulse. Then the milk-white fog covered everything. A bundle of sunshine arose and started to grow bigger and bigger until a dazzling white flame flared up, and he saw the Great Shaman. He was wearing the shaman costume with a hat decorated with a deer's antlers and holding a tambourine.

"Is it really..." the unlucky tourist could only utter.

"Yes, it's me. Why did you disturb my arkansas? Why did you need to touch my burial place?" said the Shaman with reproach.

"I... I... I'm so... so... sorry, I... I didn't know," stammered the blunderer.

"You're gonna know now then. From now on, you will have no rest! No peace of mind! The curse will always be upon your heels. Remember: never disturb graves again! Goodbye.

"Wait...!"

The shaman beat his tambourine. Another strong rolling sound shook the space, from earth to sky. A bright flash of light swallowed the Kama's silhouette. At last, there came a sound of his voice again, repeating solemnly: "Never disturb graves again!"

In the morning, Sergey was all shattered. He felt exhausted and bruised. "What's wrong?" Kirill asked him, stretching softly. "You've been tossing all night, talking to someone... Are you feeling ill?"

"Leave me alone. I'm not in the mood to talk," Sergey cut him short.

"Well, alright then. Go pack your things. We're going straight after breakfast".

When they got out of the tent, everyone had already been awake for a long time. Someone was packing the tents; someone was cooking over a fire. The camp was buzzing with activity, and everyone looked cheerful and happy. Everyone but Sergey. He was down in the dumps and didn't talk to anyone. Nobody paid attention to him; they were too busy. The tourists had breakfast quickly and continued their way.

As soon as they left, the fog suddenly descended on the mountains. It appeared out of nowhere as if one single cloud came down from heaven

and covered everything within a minute. Even animals don't travel too far in such bad weather. They are just waiting until it's gone. But the tourists were too impatient to see the beautiful landscapes of Altai, so they decided to keep on going and sometimes stop to take roll calls along the way to avoid getting lost.

"By sevens, count off!" shouted Semyonich energetically. "One!" shouted Kirill.

"Two!" Valentina "took over". "Three!" saluted Semyonich. "Four!" Christina shouted, excited.

"Five!" another cheerful voice responded. "Six!" Vera said.

"Seven", gasped Sergey. His voice quivered. He felt inexplicably anxious and uneasy.

When the roll call was over, everyone put on their backpacks and set forward.

The time for payback draws near

It was not even fifteen minutes after they started when Sergey was suddenly taken short.

"Hey guys, you can keep going. I'll catch up with you in a minute," he said in a different tone. "Ok?"

"Tummy trouble?" asked Semyonich lively.

"I don't know what's wrong with me...."

"Ok, ok, we'll wait for you here," Kirill said. "Whistle if you need something. I'm not sure about the walkie-talkie signal here".

"It's gonna be fine", refused Sergey. "It will take a minute. Keep going. The group moved on. Sergey walked a bit off the path and took off his backpack.

"Jeez, it's so heavy", he wiped his forehead. "Why is it so heavy? Am I carrying stones?"

Suddenly it dawned on him.

"Ah, I totally forgot I'm carrying this shaman junk! Hell, it's so heavy! I'd never thought it weighed so much. Sergey kept talking to himself. "I wish we could take the same path back. I would have grabbed them on the way back. This Semyonich... why does he even want to go back through the Uimon valley? It's the most popular tourist route! It would be so much better to come back through Kosh-Agach. "So exciting, so exciting!" Hell of a tour guide he is!"

He blew it off. Then he took a closer look at his backpack, thinking about what he could get rid of. Although his own things were quite heavy, he couldn't force himself to leave any of the shamanic objects. He caught himself thinking, greedily, that he wanted all of them, even if he would

strain himself on the way. He couldn't make himself leave the stolen things as if they were his last straw.

"I'm just wondering," he lit up a cigarette and said to himself, "how much will I actually get for these knick-knacks from some nerds? They like nothing better than such stuff. Or maybe I could move it to some junk market. But who actually needs this crap? No, it won't work. Maybe some kind of auction?"

The failed prowler beamed with joy.

"Exactly! An auction! This is a real thing. Each of them will cost a lot, I'm sure. Well, I'll see. Either nerds or an auction. But I definitely should manage to bring this shit back to the "mainland".

He slovenly threw his cigarette away without putting it down, spit it out and started to lumber himself with the backpack. Another "brilliant idea" dawned upon him.

"I'm gonna show them what it means to have a sense of direction. I'm gonna cut it short. I'll go round this ridge; there's a path around it, I remember. I'll leap over, and – here I am! Right in front of them. They will, like, "Oh wow, how did you get here so fast?" And I'm like, "Ah, it's nothing". Wanna see their faces after that, ha-ha".

Finally, he put the backpack on and started walking. By the time he reached the top of the mountain ridge, sweat was veiling his eyes; he felt his heart pulsing in his temples and had trouble breathing.

"Ok, let's have a look".

He looked around and gave a surprised whistle. "Holy shit, where am I? What's happening?"

The view that opened before his eyes was not the one he expected. He saw a range of mountains rising in front of him many kilometres ahead, one after another, all similar, like brothers. The highest mountain, solemn and still, was crowned with snow. Under different circumstances, he would have admired the severe beauty, magnificent and dignified. Still, this time he was definitely not in the mood. He looked at the ridges closer. Rocky, cold and unapproachable, they ascended from left to right, forming a sombre wall on the way of the hapless tourist. It was not only one ridge as he had thought; it was the biggest ridge, one of the dozens, descending from the main mountain. There could be no path "around" that place. The assertive fellow finally realized that the path he needed was going to the right, a long distance behind him, and so were his friends, his safety and his chances to survive. Sergey finally realized that it would be very hard now to catch up for the lost time. He tried to reach his friends by walkie-talkie:

"Semyonich! Semyonich! Sergey here! Can you hear? Can you hear me? Over!"

The walkie-talkie was silent.

"What I've done!" slapped his head Sergey, annoyed with himself. "How will I find them?!"

But a minute later, the wounded pride and arrogance gained the better of him, and he answered to himself:

"Ah! No big deal. Nothing bad has actually happened. All I need to do is to go down the ridge and follow the course of the stream until I reach the path. Sounds like a plan? It does. What else can I do? I can't come back, can I? It's too far. I'll go down and catch up with them much faster. Everything's gonna be alright.

Very sure of himself, Sergey started walking again. He went down into a split between two rocks. While he was going down, the sense of time changed significantly. It lingered. It became elastic like in the dream the night before. He didn't realize it at once. He noticed the familiar feeling but didn't focus on it. He was trying hard to keep going. Every step was a huge effort. The backpack weighed ten times more, bending him down. His legs were wobbly.

What the hell?" He tried to encourage himself. "I felt excellent all the time, and I didn't drink last night. What's with my legs?"

Suddenly the hapless tourist came to the realization that he was actually lost. His group was far away, and he was not going to find them. "Everything's fine. Everything's under control. I'll manage", he was trying to calm himself. But these consolations didn't help at all. The consciousness of total failure was squashing him in its clutches. He was going down the stream for a long time, but there was still no path.

"Maybe I should walk just a little longer," he spoke to himself. "Just a little bit longer, and I'll reach the path". He walked further and further until he finally realized that he no longer knew where to go. There was no path, but there was a growing anxiety squeezing his chest, and the goddamn backpack was a burden on his shoulders. It felt like forever. He sat on a stone and wiped the hot sweat off his face. It was awfully clear to him now that he was lost in this northern forest, all alone. It was a painful and desperate feeling running through him. He tried to fight it, but it was irresistible. It was fatal and overpowering. It was a feeling of indefinite loneliness, defenselessness, and nakedness in front of the wild, rampant nature. He felt desperate. This feeling crawled under his skin, and so did the imminent dusk. (He suddenly realized he had been alone in the forest for the most part of the day). This feeling was scratching like a cat inside his heart. The feeling was a vacuum in his stomach, a leech in his chest. It was impossible to get rid of it.

"Wait, Serega, wait", he kept talking to himself quietly. "It's nothing. You'll sleep here tonight, and you'll feel better in the morning and know what to do. It's not the first time you have to sleep in the forest, is it? Nothing's wrong with it. It's just that the forest is a bit different. Things will look

brighter in the morning.

He put up his tent and took some food out of his backpack. He was chewing the pack of a fruit drink, washing it down with water from the stream without even realizing it. He looked like a lost child, left unattended by his mother for the first time in his life.

Meanwhile, it was getting darker. The sun gleamed its last scarlet light, and the brightness turned into the gloomy grey of twilight. A few minutes later, the deep darkness fell over the earth, suppressing everything. Dark clouds obscured the sky. It felt cold.

Revenge of the spirits

Sergey quickly set up the tent, got inside and looked around carefully. Then he hastily got into his sleeping bag. "Shit, the zipper's stuck" he muttered, pulling the slider convulsively. He felt nervous. He put his jacket under his head and tried to think clearly. "Well, it's not the first time I'm spending a night in the forest alone. There's not much difference. Yes, people are a little bit further from me this time. I can handle it. I've been in hard situations...." But the thin, holed blanket of wishful thinking he was desperately trying to cover his restless soul with was slipping off him again and again. The dark, obsessive thoughts were persistently penetrating his unruly mind through all these holes he failed to mend; they were freezing winter air that could be neither stopped nor made warmer. "But what will I do if I don't find people tomorrow? In a few days?" He was agonizing about what to do. "How many days will I last with the food I have? What will I eat when it's over? Well, first of all, I should cut down on food. Also, I can try hunting or fishing. Or... Yes! Gathering! Gathering, by the way, is the most ancient way to survive!" He felt slightly consoled for a few seconds as if a light breeze among a desert refreshed his tired face. But this short relief was very soon followed by itching, damaging reflections again. "What exactly am I going to gather? Berries, mushrooms? It won't keep me alive for a long time. They say some roots are edible too, but how do I know which ones? What if I get poisoning? It happens to people now and then! Well, I should stop it for now. I need to get some sleep. I won't come up with anything better than that now".

He turned over and shut his eyes, trying to force himself to sleep. No way! The avalanche of thoughts didn't let him breathe. "There's no signal here at all. Well, what could I expect? Wi-fi, Jacuzzi, girls and sushi delivery? Don't give up on your dreams, bastard. Have you seen a single piece of paper here? Have you seen a beer bottle left behind? Well, a beer bottle is even too much to ask; maybe you've seen a trace of a campfire somewhere around? No, you haven't. There are no tourists here. There are not even

true adventurers, let alone morons, who don't bother to clean after themselves. So what are you going to do here alone, you loser? Have you already seen bear's shit? You have? Let me set it straight. Bears DO live here, and very soon, they'll HAVE YOU FOR BREAKFAST. He heaved a deep sigh, scratched his head, and turned on his back. The comforting thoughts were desperately trying to hold a position and let him stay in a delusive "comfort zone", at least for the night, but they were far from convincing. "It's ok, tomorrow I'll wake up, climb up the big mountain, get directions and see where to go. Everything will be perfect. It's summer now; tourists can go anywhere. I'll find people. He scratched his head again, sighed and started to gnaw his nails.

"Jeez, what am I doing? Mom used to tell me one can get belly worms like this. I've been scared of it all my life. When will I finally fall asleep? How long will this torture last?"

Insomnia seized him. First unnoticed, as it usually happens, it crawled into his heart, and there was no chance to escape or hide from it. It spread its tentacles around him, latched onto him, stinging him with hundreds of doubts. It was poisoning his mind and soul. He felt wobbly again. His legs felt like they had bags of sand attached. Unlike his body, his mind stayed unbearably clear. He was absolutely aware of what was going on. In this state of mental clarity, he found himself immersed in another world, a dreamland unknown to him. He was neither asleep nor awake. He caught himself thinking: "how can it be possible?" Subwaking, he was drawn into another world. It was a world of shadowy abstract shapes and vague emotions. It was like an active dream when a sleeping person thinks that what he sees is happening in reality. But where is the borderline that separates reality and dreams? Who set this border?

We don't even know for sure if it exists. But it was not the most important thing now. "Where am I" He shouted desperately, terrified. A bear's growling was the answer. The threatening sound convulsed everything around. He heard the sound of heavy steps approaching; they were echoing in his head. At that particular moment, when he realized how weak, unprotected and miserable, he was, spirits attacked him. He was alone. Spirits didn't let him slip into oblivion even for a short time; a swarm of obtrusive images loomed before his eyes non-stop.

He saw two fallen women walking with their arms around each other. They were both two-headed. Every single step made the heads bang against each other with a booming sound, but it didn't seem to bother their owners in the least. The dogs with bloodstained jaws and the otherworldly sadness in their eyes were yawning mournfully. One glance at them made him feel his heart at his heels; his mind froze. The wolverine, prowling around all the time, was like his headache; the unbearable pain echoed in his head with every move of the animal. A hangman with one open eye and

a torn rope around his neck winked at him and whispered: "Come over, my friend, let's talk". There were dwarfs with huge feet turned back to front. They were walking with their feet hindered part before. Sometimes somebody stepped on their feet, they stumbled and fell flat on their faces into the sticky mud, but it didn't bother them either. They kept going. There was a breastfeeding woman with a baby. She had a yellowish-green fluid dripping from her breasts instead of milk. The baby with plumpy little lips and a blank stare was greedily smacking his lips, sucking in this disgusting stinky liquid. There were also a few fat, bald and ever-hungry moneychangers with big bottomless bags. Everything they touched inevitably went into these bags, as into a dark abyss, and disappeared forever. No matter how much the moneychangers got, they were still hungry. There are loads and loads of animals, all kinds of animals... Bears with coyote's heads, crocodiles that could talk, snakes with a thousand pairs of legs, a headless wolf, a laughing lynx... They were all in front of him, an endless nightmare.

The poor fellow tried to open his eyes, but it didn't help. He wiped them – nothing changed. "What the hell? What's going on? Give me a second, and I'll show you what is what!" Convulsively, he was trying to feel the lighter in his pocket. He finally found it and flicked the spark wheel.

"Aaaaaaaa!!! Fuck! Fuck!" He screamed out of his mind.

The images didn't disappear in the light of the fire. It was impossible to chase them away. They were right in front of him. Each was alive. Each was moving, breathing, speaking and doing something. All of them were inside his mind. All these weird, horrible, disgusting creatures lived within him! Terror-stricken, desperate, he rushed out of his tent, screaming: "Let me go! Let me go now!" He shouted out, tearing his hair out.

Nothing helped. He scrunched his eyes, squeezed his temples, and opened his eyes again. They were still there! The painful dream had no end.

Now the hapless tourist was running somewhere recklessly. He was overtaken by a raging need to hide, run away, and disappear. Like an animal at bay, he was tearing around, running fast at times, then freezing again, falling and curling up on the ground, searching for shelter from the hallucination. It lasted until the visions made him lose his mind completely. He was howling and growling, jumping around in the forest, all scratched and wounded, exhausted and hungry. He was now a perfect candidate for an asylum – delirious, with a mad glint in his eyes, fighting invisible demons, talking to spirits. Finally, he fell into a deep crack between two rocks and completely trapped. It was still dark; he couldn't see anything. He dislocated his knee; the injury was quite serious. He kept screaming, but now he was calling for someone to help. This is how Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant found him.

In the Trap

It was beginning to get light. A gloomy dreary morning unwelcomed the intruder, thrown into the natural trap because of his own ignorance.

The nature was indifferent to his sufferings. He got lost in the taiga alone. He fell into the crack and injured his leg – but it was not enough for atonement. There were no excuses for his unreasonable and arrogant behaviour. The nature was rough and ruthless and showed no sign of condescendence. It was drizzling sadly and unpleasantly. It set to work so slowly, without rush, as if wanting to indicate that it's going to last for the whole day. The morning mist only made it worse. The raw clammy air went under his clothes, penetrated his skin, spine-tingling, blood-chilling, bringing the most depressing thoughts. They were swarming in his head, paralyzing his consciousness, depriving him of the last hopes to survive.

"What should I do?" freezing, he was clattering his teeth, looking at the unapproachable walls of his prison. "How high is it? Two meters? Three? Four? I can't even see. Is it even possible to get out of here?" He attempted to stand up, but a sharp stabbing pain suddenly pierced his body.

"Oh my God!!! What is that?" he cried. "Am I not going to get out? Am I going to die here like a wild animal? Am I going to get rotten like a fallen fruit? What should I do???????"

Only now he realized all the seriousness and hopelessness of the situation he got himself into. There wasn't a soul around. He was tired, hungry, cold and lonely, with an injured leg he couldn't even step on in a crack between rocks. He had no idea how to get out. The inevitability of death, waiting round the corner, hung over him like a sword of Damocles.

"It's not true! It's not true! I can't! I don't want to die! I'm young! I'm only thirty. I've got a whole life ahead of me. I want to live! I WANT TO LIVE!!!!!" he was crying like a child.

The sound of the drizzling rain was the only answer. The nature wasn't mad. It only gave him a chance to think it over. He had lots of things to think over. But a human being is very tenacious in life, and it is life itself. We are focusing on when we need to survive. He couldn't think of anything else but how to survive. He could neither see nor feel anything beyond it. "What's the length of this crack?" the hapless adventurer was thinking convulsively. "I'm gonna check it. There should be an escape from this trap!" He started creeping forward through the branches, leaves and sharp stones. Trying to overcome his pain, he was moving on almost by touch. It seemed to him that the trap would end, and he would be free. One meter, another meter. "Come on, Serega! It's not the first time you land yourself in the soup, is it? You've been into trouble before. This is nothing compared to what you've seen. You've been at war! This is better than being a mujahids' prisoner with a wound in your chest, isn't it? So it's alright. You

can do it....” And he suddenly ran onto something hard. He looked up. “NO WAY!”

“PLEASE NO!” cried he desperately.

Another unapproachable wall rose in front of him. It was totally inaccessible, with sharp edges. Desperate, cornered, he rushed to the other side. His leg!!! The injured leg reminded of itself. Making a huge effort, gritting his teeth, he started to crawl in a different direction. After a few meters that seemed a mile to him, he bumped into another invincible obstacle. Huge walls formed another cul-de-sac right in front of him.

“God, my God, what do I have to do?” he bellowed again.

This healthy brutal man with big muscles and excessive self-confidence was crying uncontrollably, driven to the extreme point of desperation. He rushed about and bellowed like a wounded wild animal, beating his head against the insurmountable walls. Over and over again, he realized the whole terror and hopelessness of the situation. Only now he started to understand how weak, helpless and lonely he actually was. He made one more effort to pull himself together.

“Let’s figure out how long I can last like this”, he was trying to think convulsively. “People can survive for a month without food, maybe even more. They say one can also go without water for three weeks. It will be hard, of course, but at least I won’t die. Experienced people say you can even drink urine. My foot is swollen, though, but it’s ok. I can endure the pain. I can make a bandage soaked in urine. But how long will I last? There’s not even space for a toilet. “All in one place”. I’m gonna die like a dung-beetle on the heap of my own shit. Fuck! What have I done? Why?”

He was thinking about it for some time but still couldn’t come up with anything better than calling for help. Well, it was reasonable.

“Hey, somebody help! People! Come here! Help me!!! Heeeey!”

He was shouting for many hours to the point of exhaustion. He shouted until he couldn’t anymore. He whistled in his whistle, hidden in a pocket of his pilot jacket; he whistled without a whistle too. He was trying until the sunset. It got colder in the crack again. Finally, completely burnt out, he fell to the ground and dozed off.

The Vision

He was haunted by nightmares for the whole night again. Spirits didn’t calm down. He overstrained himself; he was now subwaking but still hearing the wolves growling in plangent voices. Their inharmonious choir made him freeze inside. Again, he couldn’t understand whether it was in reality or in his dream. He was trying to keep bad thoughts off. “I’m in a trap. They can’t reach me here”. He calmed himself and passed out again. One of these times, falling into the abyss between dreams and reality, he

could clearly see an owl. It was sitting on a thick branch with its back to him. It noticed him and turned its head. The thoughtful and unwinking stare pierced through him. He had the overpowering fear that made him want to run away as fast as possible, far from this place. At the same time, he realized it wouldn't save him. The owl will get him anyway. Still, he kept running away. Run! Run... Suddenly there came a familiar sound behind his back. It was an incredibly soft, flowing, whistling sound of wings, closer and closer. The poor fellow kept running. Knocking down tree branches on his way, stumbling upon rocks and roots, getting scratched by knots and thorns, he kept running. A sudden sharp pain hit him like an electric shock. He felt two strong, sharp claws digging into the back of his head. He felt the owl's beak hitting him. The owl squeezed his head tight with its sharp-clawed paws, beat its wings and... His head, separated from the body, flies up with the owl. And he was aware of it!

"Where are you taking me?!" He cried, terrified. "Let me go right now!"

A moment later, everything got covered with thick milky fog, and he found himself in a strange, unfamiliar space. He could hear sighs, indistinctive speech and lamentations everywhere around. The fog slowly cleared away, and Sergey saw the abyss where the souls of deceased sinners were languishing. Each was complaining about their fate, regretted the life they had lost, things they hadn't had time to do, and goals they had never reached. All these voices together were like a choir of suffering. He could feel the hopelessness and pressure in the air of this space.

"Where am I" shouted out Sergey. At the same moment, he felt the abyss beckoning him. It was even tempting. He looked down and suddenly realized that very soon, and he would merge with it and drown in the ocean of grief and sorrow.

"No, no, no!" he shouted desperately. "Anything but this!"

Like a drowning man catching at a straw, he was grabbing the air with his hands. He was rowing, swimming, and climbing. He was doing all he could do to get out of this horrible place. Another attempt, another dash – and it seemed like he really managed to get further away from the infernal place. The gloomy clouds disappeared, and so did the pressure in the air. He gave a sigh of relief, but the next thing he saw was... the Great Shaman! He was wearing the whole shaman outfit with a horned hat with a tambourine in his hand.

"God, no! NO! NOOOOO!" cried Sergey. "Is it YOU?"

"WHY DID YOU DISTURB MY REMAINS?!" the shaman's low voice sounded like thunder. The sound shook, and the Earth and the Sky.

"I... I..." the loser backed away. "I didn't know you would know". "YOU WERE TOLD NOT TO DO IT. YOU DIDN'T LISTEN.

"I didn't believe it".

"YOU ARE GOING TO BELIEVE NOW".

"I didn't mean to...."

"WHY DID YOU TAKE MY MAGIC OBJECTS?"

"Just for fun...."

"FOR FUN? NOW I'VE ALSO HAD FUN, AS YOU CAN SEE.

"Forgive me, please. I promise I will bring everything back to its place".

"YOU KNEW YOU SHOULDN'T DO IT!"

"Forgive me, forgive me. I will put everything exactly where it was! I will! I will give it back!" jabbered the crazy fellow.

"YOU WILL NOT HAVE REST UNTIL YOU BRING EVERYTHING BACK AND GO THROUGH A RITE OF PURIFICATION... PURIFICATION... PURIFICATION..."

"But..."

The hapless braveheart didn't even have time to reply. The vision of the Shaman disappeared as quickly as it had emerged. After this, Sergey came round – he was still in his trap.

"What I've done!" he hit his head. "I'm never going to get out of here. Why did I need to steal these things? What on earth possessed me to go to that arkansas?"

Again, he was agonizing about what to do next, but his thoughts were all jumbled together. He couldn't come up with anything more or less reasonable. He felt disconnected from reality. His consciousness was obscured. His mind was wandering from one thought to another, like a hot wind in the desert, unable to find a place to stay.

"The most horrible thing is that I can't get out of the mountains if I don't bring the things back. But HOW on earth will I bring them back if I'm trapped?! Lord, oh Lord!!! HELP ME! God, if you hear me...."

The boor was raging, ripping and tearing. He was ready to do anything – turn himself inside out, jump out of his skin – if only he could rectify his mistake. He looked so dirty and scratched, exhausted and ill that one could hardly recognize him now. With his messy, dirty hair sticking out randomly, his untidy bristle, and shreds of fabric hanging on his body – this is what was left from his clothes – he didn't even look like a human anymore. But the worst part was his look! It was a look of a half-man, half-beast who had lost all hopes, a gleaming stare from the eyes that hollowed in. There was only one desire in those eyes: SURVIVE! SURVIVE WHATEVER IT TAKES! Now he truly realized what a horrible thing he had done. Without even realizing it, he finally started to make his survival possible through this first convulsive and messy repentance...

The Rescue

Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant stopped and listened. Someone was crying

wildly, heartbreakingly.

"Can you hear?" he raised his hand to Kudai Kam.

"Yes! Where do you think it comes from?" asked the young man, alarmed.

"Let's go!"

The Great Shaman chose the right direction immediately. In a few minutes, they reached the place.

"Look at this!" Saosh Yant looked down into the crack. "There's a human here! Alive!"

Kudai Kam was looking at the poor fellow closely. "How are you? Are you okay?" asked Saosh Yant.

"People?! People!!! HELP ME!" shouted the poor guy, hardly able to believe his luck.

"How are you feeling?"

"Help me. It's my leg. Take me out here!" "What's with your leg?"

"I hurt when I fell here. Help me, please!"

"Calm down, please. We will help you. This is why we are here".

Saosh Yant thought for a moment. He looked into the crack and didn't understand how to get the unlucky guy out.

"Why are you just standing there? Help me!" moaned Sergey, almost crying again.

"Kudai Kam, I don't know how we will take him out. His leg is hurt so he won't be very cooperative. Plus, we don't even have a rope. What can we do? We can't leave him here alone again, can we?"

Kudai Kam kept silent. "How long have you been here?" Saosh Yant asked Sergey.

More than 24 hours, I think. Maybe more. I can't remember. HELP ME!" he couldn't stay calm any longer.

"Do you have a rope down there by any chance?"

"No", he replied hastily and suddenly realized his stupidity. "God, what a fool I am! My backpack fell here too. There's a rope in it and whatever you want. But I couldn't attach it to anything. The walls are too steep, and my leg hurts".

"It's ok. Get your rope.

Sergey got into his backpack, took a big bundle of a good climbing rope, and threw it to Saosh Yant. He tied it to a strong, powerful tree near the crack and threw the other end to the prisoner of spirits.

"Attach your backpack first".

"Wait, take me first", cried Sergey, like a child.

"If we take *you* first," said Saosh Yant strictly, "then who is going to take your backpack out of there?"

"Ah, yes", Sergey slapped his face. "I didn't think of it. Seems like I've completely lost my mind".

Saosh Yant lifted the backpack quickly. "What's your name?"

“Serega”.

“And mine is Saosh Yant. Well, so long then, Serega `` joked the young shaman.

“NO, NO, NO! Please, don’t leave me here! Don’t do it! Don’t go” – the hapless hero got scared again.

“Please, calm down. Why are you so nervous?” The shaman’s apprentice laughed cheerfully. “I was joking. Nobody’s going to leave here. Why would we come here in the first place then?”

Saosh Yant threw the end of the rope to the victim of stupidity. He tied it around himself. Kudai Kam helped them. They threw the other end over a pine branch that was right above the trap.

“Watch out for your leg, young fellow,” said Kam. “We will pull you, and you’ll push with your healthy leg; try not to touch the injured leg at all, ok?”

“Yes, yes, I get it!”

“Ok, come on then!”

They slowly, gently and carefully took him out of the trap.

Even though he was immeasurably happy, he looked very bad. He looked miserable. The clothes were torn. His eyes and cheeks fell in. He had a dirty bristle and smelt bad. He spent only two days like this, lost and lonely, and he still had enough food, but he made an impression of a human who had spent years in isolation. This is how true loneliness, despair, and hopelessness affect a man!

How are you feeling? Can you walk?” “I guess”.

Sergey tried to step on his foot. “Ouch!” he cried from the pain.

“I see,” said Kudai Kam. “Now, you are going to make a crutch for yourself. See this young tree?”

“Yes”.

“Use it. Cut it down, not at the very root, a bit higher. This tree will grow again then. Say sorry for hurting it. Do you see these branches? You will cut off what you don’t need and make yourself a forked stick. It will support you. Got it?”

“Got it. But... aren’t you going to help me?” Sergey asked, confused. “We are already helping you”, the shaman looked at him meaningfully.

The voice of this great man had a chilling effect. The silly fellow stopped talking and realized he was wrong. He took a small axe out of his backpack, cut the tree down, exactly as Kudai Kam told him, and made a crutch. He cut off the other branches. He put the remains of his sweatshirt between the branches of the forked stick to make it softer under his armpit and tied it up with a piece of rope.

The Great Shaman was playing the Jew’s harp while he was working. The sound of it was consoling and deepening at the same time. Sergey started to see visions of himself trying on and taking off the shaman’s clothes, making fun of them. Then he saw himself climbing up the arkansas, sneering at the

burial place, “performing” and joking, insulting the shaman's remains. Then he saw himself stealing the magic objects when no one could see him... “WAIT! I got it!” he shouted and jumped to his feet.

But he fell to the ground again, stabbed with severe pain. “What did you get?” asked the shaman with reproach.

“This is all happening because of the objects. It’s them! It’s them! They are here with me! Yes!”

“You didn’t get it then”, Kudai Kam shook his head, frustrated.

“What? What do you mean? Isn’t it because I stole them? I’ll bring them back. I promise. I don’t need them. Please take them. I don’t know how to use them, he rattled on hastily, as if he was losing his mind again.

“Your stupidity is the main reason”. “What do you mean?”

“You think you can correct your mistake simply by bringing things back”. “Yes!”

“But the actual reason for all the bad things that have happened to you lies here!” the shaman hit his head with his kyamla.

Sergey was already going to be offended, but a strangely unfamiliar feeling overcame him. He could see clearly now how terribly wrong he was. He realized that nobody should touch them; better not even come too close to these places without a sufficient reason. These places are sacred. They demand a special attitude. They should be worshipped and respected. This is what he had always lacked. He lacked a humane attitude towards everything around him. He was pierced with another thought.

“I GET IT, I GET IT!” he shouted joyfully. “What did you get?” Saosh Yant laughed.

“I have to bring the things back and ask for forgiveness”. “Who will you ask about it?”

“I don’t know. HIM, I guess...?”

“At last!” Kudai Kam said calmly. “Couldn’t you understand it earlier?”

“I couldn’t! I swear! But you started to play your music, and it was like, BANG! It just clicked in my head. I know now! I have to say sorry. But how will I do it? I don’t even know where I am....”

Atonement

“Now that you understand, you need to stand up and walk, come on”, said Kudai Kam strictly.

“How? My foot hurts”.

“What is it with your foot? Get the stick and tie it up to fix your foot. Give thanks to God that the bone isn’t fractured. You’ve got a crutch now. Take it and let’s go”.

Sergey was a bit surprised but didn’t want to argue. He obeyed the Great

Shaman's orders without question. As soon as the makeshift frame was ready, he leaned against the crutch and stood up. Saosh Yant carried his backpack. Sergey had no idea where they were going or how long it would take. He followed them obediently, or rather, bounced behind them, leaning on the crutch. It was difficult for him to walk, and he stoically endured the hardships of the way. Nobody said a word. There was no walking path, and the area was completely unknown to him. There were bushes everywhere, and at times the travellers had to force their way through the heavy growth. Scratched, shabby, and the victim of his own foolishness, Sergey looked even more like a street bum now. Sharp thorns scratched his body again and again. He continued moving as if he was unaware of what was happening around him. He was just walking, following his guide, as if in a trance. He didn't realize the time or distance. He felt neither the pain in his leg nor the chafing of the crutch against his skin. None of these inconveniences existed for him. All he could feel was overwhelming hope, excitement, and even joy! He was walking in anticipation of something great and miraculous happening.

A few hours later, they reached their destination. The travellers climbed a small hill, and Sergey saw the shaman's burial place.

"Gosh! I didn't expect it to be so near!" Sergey said impulsively. "Do you recognize this place?" asked Saosh Yant reproachfully.

"Of course! Did we take a different route? How did you manage to reach this place so quickly, Kudai Kam?"

"This question is unnecessary". Saosh Yant answered, cutting him short.

"It's time to heal your leg now". "Sure! What do we need to do?" asked Sergey naively.

"First, all the magic objects must be returned to their place".

"Yes, yes, sure", the loser nodded hastily. "Can I have my backpack?" "Yes, I guess you need it".

Sergey sat on the ground and untied his backpack. He took out the objects, and his hands were shaking.

"Here, take them, please", he gave the objects to Kudai Kam. "There's something else inside", said the Great Shaman dryly. "Really? Sorry, I didn't know. But how did you...?"

"Not your concern. I know".

Sergey shook everything out of his backpack with a confused look. There was a Jew's harp hidden at the very bottom.

"Holy cow, I'm so stupid. How could I miss such a thing?"

Kudai Kam took all the shaman's things, bowed and walked towards the burial place without saying a word. Sergey instinctively started to follow him, but Saosh Yant stopped him with a powerful gesture. Sergey looked at him, perplexed.

"You are not allowed", explained Saosh Yant. "Why?" Sergey didn't

understand at first.

"You are not allowed to be there. Kudai Kam will do everything himself". "I see", Sergey sighed. "I wish I could... What shall I do now?"

"Let me have a look at your foot".

Saosh Yant took the dirty rags off the poor fellow's foot. "Wow! You really hurt yourself, didn't you".

"What do you mean?"

"Look at your foot! It's a good thing that you came to your senses when you did and became sincere! If not... The worst was yet to come!"

"I don't understand?"

"You stopped flaunting your imaginary power. You let yourself be defenceless, and the spirits reacted immediately".

"How did they react?"

"They saw that you really wanted to correct your mistake, even though you didn't understand how to do it. Your state of mind attracted the help that you needed; this is how we came to save you".

"Tell me, please, who else would have saved me if you weren't there?"

"It doesn't matter. If it weren't us, it would have been someone else. You would have been saved regardless".

"There you go...." Sergey said thoughtfully.

"What you should understand is that you should respect everything around you: water, fire, the entire nature. Spirits live everywhere, so don't make them angry. Everything is alive, and everything can feel and understand. Spirits are constantly around us".

"I think I am starting to believe what you are saying".

"Last but not least, you must never disturb graves or touch old shamanic magic objects. The most powerful spirits live inside them, and they should never be disturbed or disrespected. They won't put up with such mockery. I think you understand what I mean by now".

"Yes, I do", sighed the poor fellow sadly.

"People don't understand this one simple idea. Many physical and psychological diseases are closely connected with a human's relationships with the spirits. People get sick because they aren't at peace with the spirits. Suppose someone lives selfishly, oblivious to nature. In that case, the environment and Ayami will be pursued by misery, bad luck, and losses. It happens because the spirits can't stand it when someone treats them with disrespect. Do you see that many people are suffering from diseases nowadays?"

"Yes, I do. Medical science was not as developed back in the day as it is now, and people were much healthier. Modern doctors have all these state-of-the-art technologies, and people are so much weaker! People get diseases and die so young. Babies are born ill".

"You are on the right path. This is because people should live closer to

nature and learn the ancient knowledge. People should not ignore the wisdom of shamans, their Knowledge and Power. Only a shaman can teach an ordinary human how to live their life. Only a shaman can help people find a cure for every misery.

The great rite was finished by evening, and Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant were ready to continue on their way.

"Wait, wait, what about me?" Sergey pleaded, showing how frightened he was.

"You? You'll stay here". An enigmatic smile played around the edges of Kudai Kam's lips when he said this.

"But I won't survive here! And what if this shaman gets angry with me again?"

"Oh, look at him. You get it now, do you?" Kudai Kam continued in a mocking tone.

"Wait, you can't just leave me here like this. I'm completely alone!"

"Don't worry, hot shot, you'll manage", the shaman laughed. "You will sleep here, apologize to the shaman, and your foot won't be as swollen in the morning. Here is your crutch. Do you see that path?"

"Yes, I see it".

"Follow it and do not turn away from it. And do not put weight on your foot yet".

"But my backpack is so heavy!"

"Your backpack only weighs half of what it weighed before". "Oh, yes!" he said, slapping his forehead.

"When the path brings you to the road, a car will pick you up". "How can you be so sure? Maybe there will be no car!"

The shaman didn't answer him. He gave Sergey such a look that he immediately realized how unnecessary it was to ask this question. He suddenly felt very confident that everything would be exactly as the shaman said. He didn't know what else to say.

Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant bowed to the sacred place in farewell and continued their journey.

In harmony with spirits

Sergey watched the beautiful sunset, set up his tent, got into his sleeping bag and slept like a baby. He was still sub-waking, floating between the dream world and reality. He was neither awake nor asleep, but he was aware of what was happening to him. He was constantly sensing the presence of the Great Shaman. He even saw a glimpse of his image once. The shaman was in his full shamanic regalia. It was the exact same outfit that he had recently tried to steal.

The Shaman looked calm and even pleased. He seemed to bless him and say goodbye. His rolling overtone singing was breaking the absolute silence. The traveller was filled with an all-embracing serenity and certainty about his strength.

He woke up in high spirits, elated even. He quickly had some food, packed his things and started walking the path. Everything went smoothly, exactly as Kudai Kam had predicted. Three days later, the “hero” arrived home. His foot had healed, and he could put weight on it by then. It seemed as if nothing had changed. Or had it? Of course, it had. Something had changed inside of him. His perception was different. He now understood that one should respect graves, especially the graves of Great Shamans. They should be worshipped and treated with respect. He had also learned that everything is alive and inhabited by spirits and that one should be careful with nature. One should love, understand and respect nature, as our great ancestors, the shamans, had taught us.

One year earlier The easiest way is the hardest!

The dawn was breaking, and the first rays of the rising sun splashed the curved ridges and unapproachable snow-capped mountains with a tender scarlet light. The sun was slowly rising, higher and higher as if it was still drowsing. It came out of its nighttime shelter and finally revealed its burning and bright face to the world.

“It will be a nice day”, thought Saosh Yant. “Kudai Kam taught me well how to predict the weather conditions. I no longer need a meteorologist for weather forecasting.”

Immersed in his thoughts, he made his way through the deep snow of the wild on his skis until he reached a beautiful forest lake. He drew the fir boughs apart to look at the incredible landscape. The lake was still dozing under a peaceful blanket of snow. The first signs of spring could already be noticed, though. The snow had started to recede on the ice melt and had turned grey. There were patches without snow where one could see the soft and yellowish spring ice.

“Maybe I can try to walk on it like it’s still winter? I wonder if the ice will hold?” thought Saosh Yant.

He froze for a second, listening to the sensations of his body and trying to figure out if the ice was thick enough. Then his sensible nature took over, and Saosh Yant started estimating the size of the lake.

“Yes”, he decided. “It will definitely take longer to go around the whole lake. It’s better to walk across it. I am constantly sinking into this soft snow, which makes for a very slow going. I’ll take a shortcut and save my time and energy”. With this, he started his way across the lake.

When he reached the middle of the lake, he could see the mountains and everything around him illuminated in delicate golden colours. The nature that had seemed so lifeless before was awakening to the salutary rays of the sun. Saosh Yant gazed at the heavenly body with admiration, made a bow, saluted the sun with the “Surya Namaskar” practice, and then continued.

“I’ll see Kudai Kam soon!” he thought. “I will finally learn more shamanic practices. He told me so casually last time that he would teach me ancient healing methods. It will happen so soon! I’m almost across the lake, almost there!”

He didn’t notice the very fragile piece of yellow ice that he stepped on or the cracking sound under his feet as he continued walking. He was lost in his thoughts in anticipation of the long-awaited meeting. When he finally realized what he had heard, it was too late. He was walking too quickly, by leaps and bounds, and it took a second to feel the ground crumble under his feet. He felt terribly frightened, and time suddenly changed and slowed down. He felt every movement of his body as he went under the ice. He felt his body drowning in slow motion. The burning cold water immediately went under his clothes and inside his snow boots. It felt as if thousands of sharp needles were piercing his body.

“Skis! I need to get rid of the skis!” he thought immediately. “If I don’t take them off, I will definitely drown”.

He tried to release them to no avail. The skis were firmly attached to his feet, fastened to his valenki with special springs.

“I can’t take them off!” he thought desperately. “What can I do? God, it’s so freezing cold! I have gotta get out of here now, or else....”

He tried in vain to release the skis again.

The thought occurred to him, “I need to give my skis and my valenki to Erlik, otherwise, I’ll meet him myself very soon”.

He managed to quickly take off his valenki and the attached skis and felt a huge relief. He stopped sinking and immediately became lighter. He thought he could swim, but the unbearable cold was clutching at his body, suffocating him. He could not breathe deeply and felt the overwhelming sensation of being smothered.

“The most important thing is not to panic!” he thought, trying to keep calm. “Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in again! Well done! Now swim!” He pulled himself together and started to swim to the edge of the ice-hole with all of his might. When he reached the edge of the ice hole, he floated on the ice for a few seconds. Then he leaned against it with both hands and started to pull himself upwards. He was almost out when the insidious ice cracked under his hands. Back into the freezing water, he went.

“What should I do?” Thoughts were flashing through his mind. “Just don’t panic. If I do, I will die immediately. Breathe in, breathe out, in again....” He

made himself move and swam towards the new edge of the icehole. He started to pull himself up when the ice cracked again. As soon as he would lean against it with the full weight of his body, the spiteful ice would break.

"Is this the end?!" He wondered incredulously. "I'm not gonna give up so easily!" With an incredible effort of will, he pushed away the old ice ledge and rushed to the new edge with a strength impossible for the average human. At this moment, he felt neither cold, pain nor fear. He just wanted to live! He desperately wanted to live. He wanted to learn and gain the ancient knowledge from Kudai Kam, and become a true successor of the shamanic traditions and help people!

Out of the blue

He was almost completely spent when he reached the edge of the ice again. He leaned on it first with one hand and then the other and was about to try to pull himself up when he saw Kudai Kam running to him from the shore. The Great Kam was moving in huge leaps, looking more like a snow leopard than a human. He was not wearing his full shamanic outfit this time; he had only a light overcoat and no headwear. His hair waved in the wind in rhythm with his movements. He wore light leather moccasins and carried a weird stick with ropes tied up to it from both ends. He ran with unusual grace and ease for his age. "Finally!" Saosh Yant gasped, excited and relieved.

"Freeze!" shouted Kudai Kam to him furiously. "Don't move!"

Saosh Yant fixed himself to the spot, perplexed. He didn't understand why he had to stop moving but would not disobey Kudai Kam. He held on to the ice edge with his last bit of strength as his face became numb.

Kudai Kam had already reached the shore and was careful not to step on the ice. He sprawled across the surface of the ice and started to quickly and carefully crawl forward, holding the strange stick in front of him. He wasn't so much crawling as he was soaring above the ice. He came to a stop and pushed the stick forward with all his might. He seemed to know exactly how to do this. Saosh Yant saw the end of the stick with the rope appear in front of him.

"Grab it!" shouted Kudai Kam.

Saosh Yant grabbed the rope with his, almost numb fingers. "Wind it around your wrist", Kam shouted.

Saosh Yant didn't need to be told twice. He instinctively wanted to try to pull himself up again, but Kudai Kam's broken and muffled voice warned him:

"Stop! Do not try to do anything by yourself!"

Saosh Yant was startled by this and dropped the rope. He managed to snag it again, the living definition of a drowning man clutching at a straw. "Now, carefully, lift one leg and one arm onto the edge of the ice ", shouted Kudai Kam authoritatively.

Saosh Yant leaned against the ice edge as carefully as he could. He was terribly afraid that the ice would break again, but this time it held.

"Good! Now carefully get out of the water. Try to sprawl out on the ice as much as possible without making any sudden movements!"

Saosh Yant stretched as much as he could and started to clamber up the ice, trying not to repeat his previous mistakes. When he found himself out of the water, he looked up at Kudai Kam. His body was completely numb.

"Well done! Now crawl to me! Do it smoothly, with no sudden movements. Crawl like a snake!"

Saosh Yant immediately felt like a snake and started to crawl very carefully and smoothly to reach the shore of salvation. He desperately wanted to reach the shore. He noticed himself wanting to jump to his feet at times and run on the ice. It was a great effort of will for him to suppress this desire, overcoming the freezing cold. At some point, his body was so numb that he felt as if he was somewhere between the dream world and reality. The airy mirage of afterworld images blurred his inner vision.

"Now, let the rope go and roll over towards me!" Kudai Kam commanded harshly.

His voice pulled Saosh Yant away from the outskirts of his consciousness and saved him. Barely able to feel his body, Saosh Yant turned around to face the shore and managed to take the rope off his numb wrist. He started to roll closer and closer to Kudai Kam. He saw the images of the grey sky and the grey ice mixing into each other before everything turned off, and he fell out of consciousness completely.

Healing of Saosh. The magic drops

The monotonous and vibrant voice of the tambourine was accompanied by an amazing and irresistible overtone singing. The iridescent sounds whipped away the curtain of unconsciousness where Saosh Yant had lingered.

"What's going on? Am I dead" Saosh Yant wondered. "But where are the spirits that are supposed to tear my flesh apart? Where is the river of time that I should cross backwards in my boat in order to reach the lake of suffering and tears? Where's Erlik's kingdom that I should visit before proceeding to the Milky Way? Where am I? I can only remember fighting to survive in that horrible ice hole, and then... Ah! I remember now! Kudai Kam came to me! I guess he saved me, and I'm at his place! Yes! I recognize

his mighty voice! Only he can sing as if he has two voices that are both singing at the same time. One of them is low and powerful, like the voice of a Siberian stag, and the other one is tinkling and flying, reminding one of a Jew's harp. Of course, it's Kudai Kam!"

Saosh Yant bounced out of his bed in excitement. Strong arms grasped him from behind and immediately returned him to his place.

"Lie down, Saosh! It's too early for you to get up!" said a voice. "The Spirits haven't finished their work yet. Lie there calmly and have more rest. They still need to put you back together".

"Who is it?" Saosh Yant thought. "What a familiar voice! But I can't see the face at all. What am I lying on, by the way?"

He passed his hand over the surface. It felt like a rough, long-haired animal skin. He moved his hand to the right and felt long, firm claws that seemed to be carved out of solid wood. They were much longer than human fingers.

"This is a bear skin!" figured Saosh Yant. "Yes, I'm sure that's a bearsmell. Well, I'm definitely not dead. They must be performing the ritual of the shamanic journey. They are going to return the strength to me". He listened to the mesmerizing sound a bit longer and then fell back into the dream world.

He came to when someone forcefully took the bear skin off him and turned him onto his back. Saosh Yant looked at the stranger closely and recognized Kudai Kam's niece, a young, beautiful, strong girl named Chinat. There was a pleasant harmony in her pretty face with eyes that were slightly slanted. She had a fresh look, active and hard-working, with strong and muscular arms. There was an aura of health, youth and energy around her. She was just a couple of years older than Saosh. He was surprised to see her.

"Chinat! It's you! What are you doing?" Saosh exclaimed, perplexed and frightened. "Stop this right now! I'm not dressed!"

"Hush!" said the young woman firmly. "You are still weak! You should not expose yourself to emotions yet! You need to get stronger first. Stay calm!"

"Then let me put my clothes on!"

"Don't move. You are too weak now. You need to gain your strength back first". She started to energetically rub a liquid into his skin.

"What's that?!" he shouted, surprised. "Alcohol. Don't move".

"Well, that's the wrong application of alcohol. Let me do it" he tried to reach the bowl.

"Don't touch it!" the woman shouted in a powerful voice. "It will kill you!" Saosh Yant was stunned by such an unexpected and forceful energy coming from her voice. His hand stopped halfway, and he jerked it away from the bowl.

"What do you mean by 'kill'?" he asked, puzzled. "I didn't know. It usually

only helps”.

“Your inner fire is out, and you’ve only got cold inside of you. That’s why it’s dangerous. If you take it, the vessel of your body can extinguish, and you’ll die”.

“So what should I do?” he with a helpless gesture.

“Nothing. Just be quiet”, Chinat said dryly, starting to rub him again. Saosh Yant understood that arguing was pointless and stopped talking, focusing only on physical sensations. Chinat continued to rub the entire front part of his body and then turned him on his belly in one strong movement, with no thought to being gentle. She rubbed the back of his body with the same powerful energy.

He immediately felt his body getting warm. His skin was burning, but under the skin, he felt tiny chilling streams running through his body. “What’s going on?” he wondered, looking at his arms and legs.

“Don’t move or do anything!” the woman ordered strictly. “The cold inside you is going to meet the fire outside. That is why you are feeling so weird right now. The cold will soon leave your body, and you will feel much better. Now don’t move! Look inside yourself! Breathe calmly. Take a strong deep breath. You need a lungful of air”. She finished and wrapped him in the bearskin again.

Saosh immediately felt as if he was put inside a thermos. The alcohol was warming his skin, and the blanket didn’t let the warmth out. He heard the monotonous singing and rhythmic sounds of a tambourine. It was a pleasure to feel the burning streams of energy fighting the chilling cold in his body. His whole body was trembling, and he started sweating all over. A haze of dreams embraced him, and he fell into the imaginary world again.

He couldn’t tell how long it lasted. When he came to, he was soaked in sweat, but there was no longer any cold inside of him. He was very thirsty. The room was dead silent, and the ritual seemed to be over. He could see the light through the hole in the ceiling of the tent.

“Daylight? Already? How long did I sleep for? A day? Longer ?” he was thinking frantically. “Where is the woman that was rubbing me with alcohol? Was she only in my dream? How sore my throat is! It must be my tonsillitis again. I need water, really need water!”

He sat up in his bed and saw Chinat in front of him. She was watching him carefully and strictly.

“What are you doing here?” Saosh exclaimed, puzzled.

“The Great Shaman has brought your soul back from Erlik. You are safe now. He has spent a lot of energy and is resting. He said you’ve got a dark spirit in your throat and it’s taking your energy”.

“Yes, I’ve had this tonsillitis problem since I was a child. My throat is getting swollen. I’m worried that I’ll start suffocating again”, Saosh Yant said with

concern.

"Don't talk", Chinat interrupted. "Just follow these instructions that the Great Shaman gave you. This is a herbal elixir that you should use daily".

"What is it called?"

"I don't know. The Great Shaman makes it himself from some herbs that he collects in a place that nobody knows. We call this elixir "magic drops". "Interesting", Saosh Yant opened the bottle and smelled the elixir. "Weird smell. I've never seen this before".

He looked inside and held it up to the light. The liquid was dark and smelled like alcohol, and something else – Saosh didn't know what it was.

"Ok, I'll try it". He opened the bottle and was ready to take a sip..."Stop it! Don't," came Chinat's scared voice.

"Jesus, what is it now?" Saosh was starting to get annoyed. "You just told me to drink it".

"Stop, silly. It can kill you!

"You've just given it to me and told me it's from Kudai Kam! How should I understand you, woman?"

"Right, right", Chinat nodded. "But..."

"What?" Saosh felt very annoyed now that he was starting to feel better.

"You should know how exactly to apply it. Otherwise it can kill you!"

"Well then tell me, I'm listening," the young man said, lowering his voice.

"You can't just drink it like this. First, you should dilute one drop of the elixir in a glass of water and take it after eating three times a day. The next day dilute two drops, also three times a day. The third day – three drops, the fourth day – four drops. You do this for ten days.

"That's it? It's so easy?" he asked.

"No, it's not. Be patient", said the woman meaningfully. "I'm all ears".

"Then you start to reduce the amount: nine drops, eight drops, reducing the amount every day from ten drops back to zero".

"Huh, this is interesting. What's the trick?"

"This medicine is very strong, and your body will adapt to it very slowly. It can make you feel pretty horrible if you take too much or suddenly stop taking it".

"Do you mean it's a poison?" the question dawned on him. She nodded quietly.

"So weird. Why does a poison help? I don't get it".

"Your inner power will increase as soon as it meets the power of this plant. This is how it works. If someone is old or has a very serious disease, then the power is asleep inside of them. This is why diseases start to overcome them. The power inside them should be "shaken" so that they would wake up and fight for their health. These magic drops are perfect for this".

"What a name! "Magic drops"!" said the young fellow thoughtfully.

"It's true. They have helped so many people get back on their feet. We had a

real disaster here once. Everyone got sick because of a flu epidemic. Someone brought the virus here from a big city, and the whole village caught it. The children, in particular, were suffering so much! I felt so sorry for them. Kudai Kam was away at the time and couldn't come to help us. We started curing ourselves with these magic drops. It helps old people to be stronger, and it suppresses cancer. This medicine cures many diseases".

"What do you feel when you take them?"

"You will feel nothing for the first and second day. On the third day, you might feel slightly better. On the sixth and seventh days, it will feel as if a person inside of you had jumped to attention and grabbed a weapon to protect you. It's a feeling of a real power inside. Everyone felt it, even the old people. These "magic drops" cured us, and we didn't have to take a single pill or do any injections".

"Look, if these "magic drops" are so good, maybe a person should take them before the illness starts to take a hold of them? What if a person takes them in advance to increase this power?"

It's definitely possible. We actually forgot that we had them. There were some people from our village who had been sent home from their hospitals to die. The hospitals didn't want to be responsible for the patients anymore".

"Unbelievable!"

"Can you imagine the level of health care that we have here? If you need to visit a doctor, you have to go to the district center, which is worlds away, and you pay a lot of money for this. Nothing is free these days".

"I don't really know", Saosh shook his head. "I don't go to doctors".

"Well, of course, you don't. You're so young. The old people tell us: 'Sometimes I wake up in the morning and feel the disease coming. I say to it, 'Stay away from me, disease!' and then go to work. If you have these "magic drops" at hand, it's even better!' Despite waiting to start taking these drops, they were so helpful!"

"You are definitely right. Better late than never", agreed Saosh, wrapping himself up in the blanket. "Please, make a portion for me. I'd like to try them".

"You won't feel anything immediately". "But I should still take them, right".

"Yes, I am just saying".

The young woman took a clay bowl, poured some water into it, shook the bottle and opened it. She whispered something over the bowl and put one drop of the dark brown elixir in it.

"Here", she handed it to the young man.

He took the bowl and smelled it again. It was the same smell, just a bit thinner. Saosh looked at the liquid closely. It was almost transparent. Without further hesitation, he drank it.

"Not bad. The smell is a bit peculiar, but it's still nice. What's next?"

"Nothing". Chinat looked indifferent.

"When am I going to feel something?"

"I already told you, silly!" the woman was getting slightly angry. "In 6-7 days! Now, you need to sleep!"

"Ok". Saosh turned to the wall and closed his eyes.

He was starting to fall asleep when he felt someone raise the blanket slightly and slide under it. He felt the warmth of a body behind his back.

"Who is that? What are you doing?" Saosh turned and then froze. "CHINAT?! Stop, what are you doing? Don't you have any shame? Go away!"

He felt for a moment that he had enough strength to force her to leave and was ready to push her away.

"Hush", she put her finger to his lips. "Be quiet". "Why are you doing this?"

"Don't argue. This is important". She hugged him from behind, and he could feel that she was completely naked.

"Don't! Aren't you ashamed? I can't...."

"You don't have to do anything. You can fall asleep".

"But you are a woman, and I am a man. What will your relatives think? What if someone finds out what you're doing?"

"It is not frowned upon here. It is customary", whispered the girl, holding him tighter.

"Nice customs you've got here!"

"I'm not doing it for pleasure or for fun. I'm going to heal you. You'll see why; you'll feel so much better", she was lulling him.

"But..."

"Don't talk. Save your energy. I'm not married, so I can do this. I won't harm you. I will only heal you. Now go to sleep".

Chinat cuddled up to him with her warm and delicate young body. Her touch was like warmth and tranquillity itself. Her smell was irresistible. The smell of a young and healthy woman's skin. Saosh felt her so strongly as if she was penetrating under his skin. He enjoyed her touch, and at the same time, he felt calmed and quieted. His instincts resisted this unfamiliar feeling for some time, but soon an unknown Force pulled him away, and he slid back into the fluid world of dreams.

Chinat leaves

Strange sounds woke him in the morning. He heard someone scratching and moaning nearby. He sat up on the bed and looked around. Chinat wasn't with him. He wrapped himself up in the bearskin and got out of the yurt⁶. The rays of the morning sun hurt his eyes. The young woman was

⁶ A traditional yurt is a portable, round tent covered with skins or felt and used as a dwelling by nomads in the steppes of Central Asia.

sitting with her back to the tent and singing a folk song in a beautiful lingering voice. She was wearing a deer fur cape.

"Chinat? Is that you?" he was a bit surprised that she was still there. "How long was I sleeping? Is it morning now?" he said, squinting his eyes. The sun was shining brightly.

"It's afternoon now" she gave him a friendly smile and put her work away. She had been mixing herbs and grinding them with a pestle.

"So late! What did I miss?"

"You need to save your energy", she said gently. "By the way, it's time to take more magic drops".

"Ok. Still one drop?"

"No, today you should take two".

"But it hasn't even been 24 hours since I took the first one", Saosh said stubbornly.

"You took two more drops while you slept". "I don't remember this?"

"You were really weak and even hallucinating in your dreams. You asked me for water several times. I mixed magic drops into the water".

"I see. So apparently, one actually can poison someone in their sleep", the young man joked gloomily.

Chinat glanced at him with reproach.

"I wasn't trying to poison you", she said emotionally. Saosh felt ashamed of his words. "Besides, nobody forced you to cross the lake".

"Yes, it was my biggest mistake", he said, casting down his eyes.

"Exactly. It was a mistake that could have cost you your life. So be grateful for everything that I'm doing for you".

"I'm sorry! Please, forgive me!" Saosh took her hand with a guilty air.

"I'm not angry with you", she said strictly, withdrawing her hand from his.

"Kudai Kam told me to take care of you, so that's what I'm doing".

"Thank you! I really appreciate it. Please, forgive me!" "It's time to take magic drops. Let's go back inside".

They returned to the tent's cosiness and calmness, hiding from the sun. He sat down on his bed. Chinat poured water into the bowl, put two drops of the elixir in and gave it to Saosh.

It tasted stronger this time but still quite soft.

"Tomorrow is the third day, and I will leave you", the woman said strictly.

"No, wait! Don't go! I'm so used to having you here", Saosh suddenly felt some invisible connection with her. He felt as if some of her energy had infused into his body last night. He felt so much better. He felt almost healthy and didn't want to spend the whole day in bed anymore.

"You are strong enough to take care of yourself now. You also know how to take the magic drops, so I have no reason to stay here any longer and fiddle about", she said in a rough voice.

"Don't fiddle about. Just come to me tonight", Saosh hugged her waist and

tried to pull her closer to himself.

"Stop it, devil!" she twisted and got out of his grasp.

"But you came to me last night of your own accord!" Saosh looked like a miserable cat that had been drenched in water.

"I was only healing you", the woman said dryly.

"Oh really? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I did tell you. I told you I was going to heal you".

"Ah yes... I might have misunderstood".

"You understood it very well. Now go back to your bed and rest more".

"I don't want to. I want to spend more time with you".

"Kudai Kam told me you should get up in three days, not before that. Go! I have no time to waste".

She turned her back to him and continued her work.

Discouraged, confused, and feeling like she had thrown a wet blanket on him he returned to bed. He had nothing else to do. The next day he woke up to find that Chinat had left without saying goodbye. He was really puzzled by this behaviour.

"She just left! No goodbye, nothing!" He thought, annoyed and disappointed, pouring out the magic medicine drop by drop. "A true woman! Seduced me and tricked me like this! How can anyone believe a woman?"

He swallowed the medicine. It tasted much stronger now.

"Well, I will have to take it twice more today", he thought. "I mustn't forget about it. Why did she leave me alone? She was so good at taking care of me... Ok, what should I do? I would have written it down, but my notebook must be soaking wet".

He looked around and saw an axe and a large pile of wood nearby.

"I'm gonna make marks with the axe so I won't forget".

This is how Saosh started to comprehend the intricacies of herbalism. This first experience turned out to be very practical. Seven days later, he felt stronger and more powerful than ever, like a great knight from the old legends. In Twenty days, he finished the course and could hardly remember the disease. By that time, Kudai Kam had returned and was teaching him other shamanic mysteries. But this is a different story for another time...

Spirit Catcher Ancestral Knowledge. The World Tree

The Great Shaman Kudai Kam had recently moved to a new place. His home looked exactly as it had before. There was still a cosy place in the corner where he kept his magic objects. His weapons were still next to the entrance. His things were all in their places. Animal skins were on the floor and on the walls. The same household items... As if nothing had changed. As Saosh Yant sat in this new tent, he could sense that the vibes were very

different. This place was much more powerful. One could clearly feel the presence of a huge pillar of pure white light reaching from the ground to the sky. This pillar was going straight to heaven, to the god of Eternity, Tengri Han.

They were resting after a long travel to an ancient shamanic burial place. It was a pleasure to feel tired after a healthy walk. The lazy languor was flowing through their arms and legs in light waves. The young man stretched, delighted, and a very simple thing occurred to him: nothing can be as rejuvenating, resurrecting and empowering as a long exhausting hike in the mountains. Absorbing this fresh energy that streamed through his body, Saosh Yant suddenly realized what he had been missing while he was living the “easy life”. He also realized what kind of man he would have become if he had continued living that life. It didn’t upset him now, for he knew that everything would be different.

There was a hearth in the middle of the tent. The Great Shaman was doing his magic, making a delicious tea from wild Altai herbs. Saosh Yant took off some of his outerwear and hung them up to dry next to the fire. Kudai Kam’s outfit was drying there as well. He enjoyed the magical dance of the flames while sitting next to the fire. It was mesmerizing. His cheeks were burning like two flames in the heat of the fire. The insatiable fire was greedily devouring dry birch wood with a crackling sound. The smoke swirled upwards through a smoke flap in the tent. It was not an ordinary hearth. Saosh had only seen one like this before when he was little. The most unusual thing about the hearth was the tall, strong birch tree next to it. The top of the tree was coming out through the smoke flap in the tent.

“Kudai Kam, may I ask you a question?” asked Saosh Yant.

Kudai Kam nodded silently, throwing a handful of aromatic herbs into the water that was about to boil. His attention was always focused on what he was doing at that particular moment.

“Why do shamans have these trees in their tents? I remember that I’ve seen it before. When I was a child, they took me to a shaman one time to cure me. That tree seemed so huge to me! I haven’t seen them anywhere else. Tell me, why do you need them?”

“It symbolizes the World tree, which connects the three worlds: the Upper, the Middle and the Lower. Gods and higher beings live in the Upper World. Humans and the familiar spirits live here in the Middle World. And the Lower world is inhabited with lower beings and demons – the evil spirits of diseases, losses and miseries”.

Saosh Yant thought about this for some time.

“Our world is very close to the Lower one, so it’s easy for the lower spirits to reach us”.

“Ah! That’s why there are so many losses and diseases in this world? Because of these spirits! Right?”

Kudai Kam nodded and moved the pot with the boiled water away from the fire.

"What about the Upper world?" asked Saosh Yant. "Is it inaccessible for us?"

"It is accessible. But it's difficult to reach". "Why?"

"Because it requires efforts. Without effort, it is much easier to head downwards. Most people spend their entire lives heading downwards. You can see that many of the people of Altai lose themselves in drinking these days". "Yes, it's like a national disaster".

"Exactly. It happens because, without effort, a human being can only go down. One has to work hard to go up".

The Great Shaman finished talking and continued stirring the herbal tea in the pot.

Why and How to Decorate the New Year's Tree?

The young man glanced at the birch tree and suddenly noticed seven steps that were carved into its trunk.

"What is this for, Kudai Kam?" he asked, surprised.

"These steps mean that a shaman can ascend to the seventh heaven. Every step represents one of the heavens", explained Kudai Kam.

"Why do you need it?"

"A true shaman can travel anywhere that they want to. All the worlds are within their power. They can ask any God in any of the worlds for good luck or help in curing someone. They can ask for anything that people ask a shaman for".

"So that is the true secret of a shaman's power, isn't it?"

"Yes. You didn't think of this before? In the places where you grew up.... they brought the New Year's tree home, didn't they?"

"Yes, but the New Year is a special day, and the tree is just for decoration", Saosh Yant smiled, pleased with the memories. "The New Year's tree, fairy lights, shiny balls... and the smell of tangerines everywhere".

"Ha-ha!" Kudai Kam laughed in amusement. "Tangerines!"

There was so much of the energy of life, strength, sincere love and kindness in his laugh! Such an infectious laugh! Some incomprehensible magic and zest for life resounded in his laughter!

"Yes, this is how it is", answered the young fellow, a bit disconcerted. "We do it every year. What's so funny about it?"

"Do you know that it's an ancient shamanic ritual?"

"Ah yes, actually, I heard that from my grandpa", Saosh Yant scratched his head.

"There you go! This fir tree is not just decoration for your event. It reminds

people of an ancient ritual. It symbolizes the World tree, which connects the three worlds. The roots are the Lower world, the trunk is the Middle world, and the top of the tree is the Upper world”.

“And the decorations?”

“The decorations are supposed to represent souls, events and objects that originate in the Upper world and then are embodied in the physical one. When things wear out and break, they will go to Erlik’s world, the lower world. In ancient times each ‘toy’ decoration contained the concept of a certain soul, object or event that people wanted to be ‘implemented’ in their life”.

“Wait, Kudai Kam”, the young man interrupted him. “Seriously? Do you think these colourful balls, icicles and party poppers can help events to happen in real life? Sounds a bit dodgy to me”.

Kudai Kam laughed again, cheerfully, contagiously.

“You’re right! Balls and icicles won’t do! People have long forgotten how to decorate the New Year’s tree properly. They don’t understand the ritual at all. One should not decorate it with meaningless and fashionable things. You should hang special shamanic items on the tree to attract the event they symbolize. If a couple wants a baby or a shepherd waits for an animal to give birth, or a merchant desires more money, they need to make symbols of these things with special objects”.

“Who would make them?”

“The people would make them. The couple would make a toy to represent their future child, the shepherd would make a little statue for the animal, and the merchant would make a symbolic image of money. Then a shaman or a special priest would perform a ritual to spiritualize them. After the ritual, each object would have a corresponding soul, so you can say that shamans “animated” them. Then people would sing and dance in a ring around the tree, which made these objects even more powerful. They were filling them with the energy of their desires, with every intention”.

“Wow! That’s amazing” the young man smacked his tongue. “It is so different from what people do nowadays! They just get drunk and sleep under that tree! How have we stooped so low? Tell me, when people celebrate like that, does it affect the whole year?”

“Of course it does! It’s like forecasting misery for yourself! Celebrating in this way causes a human being to lose their health and luck. Everything in our life affects us!”

“So, instead of drinking alcohol and watching TV, one should dance in circles around the New Year’s tree and make wishes?”

“Well, yes...” said Kudai Kam sadly. “It does sound like a children’s game that was played in kindergartens, doesn’t it? This is unfortunately how a lot of the ancient rituals remain in our lives now, as games for children”.

“Yes. I remember a game from my childhood. We were standing in a circle

and holding each other's hands. Then we started to sway and repeat together: *"Sea runs high one, sea runs high two, sea runs high three, make a figure in the sea!"* Then we let our hands go and stood there, each person freezing in their own pose. It felt very unusual".

"Yes, it helps you to understand yourself. Especially if the pose you choose is very uncomfortable".

"Freeze-unfreeze" (or "die-live") was another game. Those poses were even worse, but we tried our best to stand as long as we could, for example, on one foot".

"Yes, all these games are the echoes of the ancient rituals and practices, long forgotten by modern people".

"We danced around the New Year's tree too, I remember. But how does one do it correctly?"

"If you want to attract something that you want in your life, you should walk around the tree clockwise. It creates a field of positive energy. Each participant should shout out a common desire that they share with the group, filling it with energy and emotions. It's much better if everyone has similar wishes and thinks about them similarly. It's more difficult to do on your own because the field of positive energy will be much smaller". "It sounds so interesting!" Saosh Yant said excitedly. His eyes were shining. "Tell me more about how they decorated the tree. It was a sacred process too, wasn't it?"

"Of course! How could it not be? They used to place an image of Ulgen, the God of Future, on top of the tree because this is where the new objects and phenomena come from, where all new ideas, forms and projects exist. Tengri Han's image should be placed above everything because it depends on him whether your wishes will come true or not! A hair won't fall off your head without the Supreme God's approval! They also placed an image of Erlik under the tree to symbolize the Underground world where all the obsolete phenomena and forms go. This God is depicted strictly and severe. It is his image that people turned into the famous "Grandpa Frost". People would ask him not to take the souls of humans and their cattle to the world of the dead, not to send them miseries and diseases or destroy their lives. Above Erlik, there was Umai – "Snegurochka" – the goddess who takes care of everything that is to be fulfilled and saved from Erlik.

"Ah! That's why she is always so cheerful and joyful!" "Exactly".

"But she is his granddaughter, isn't she? So they are relatives?"

"Yes. Umai doesn't create anything. She only keeps. Anyway, no matter how hard she tries, sooner or later, everything goes into non-existence, to Erlik's underground world".

"What else?" Saosh asked curiously. "Tell me more. It's so interesting".

Mother Beast or Who Gave You Birth?

“When these souls or spirits of the phenomena were hung on the tree, they were raised by Mothers Beasts”.

“What is a Mother Beast?” asked the young man. “It’s a force that materializes these souls”.

“What do you mean?”

“For example, there are shamans who perform rituals for Erlik. They have their own Mother Beast. Other shamans perform rituals for Ulgen; they have another Mother Beast. Umai’s and Tengri Han’s shamans have their own as well. Ordinary people are born to work for a certain God. Some people sow the seeds of discord, devoting themselves to Erlik. Such people participate in wars, use or invent weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction, work for funeral parlours or even be professional killers. These people’s Mother Beast comes from Erlik. People who create something devote themselves to Ulgen. Like fortunetellers, people who make scientific discoveries, invent new things, create arts, do crafts, or predict the future. They are driven by a different force, a different Mother Beast”.

“So exciting!” said Saosh Yant, trying to absorb and remember every single word. “Tell me more, please, Kudai Kam, what about Tengri and Umai?”

“Tengri represents the world of Eternity. Everyone who pays their special attention to Tengri got a Mother Beast from him”.

“Who do you mean? Who is everyone?”

“Shamans, votaries, devotees. Mystics, Sufis, and many others. Everyone who has ever been very devoted”.

“What about Umai?”

“Those who do physical jobs belong to Umai. People who accumulate and save material things. Tradesmen, salesmen, businessmen, everyone related to sales and those who are into the landscaping or urban land improvements are hers too. Farmers and everyone who is a part of agriculture. Plus, designers, fashion designers, hairdressers, stylists, chefs, and everyone involved in all kinds of services”.

“So interesting! Tell me more!” the young man couldn’t stop.

“What a curious young fellow!” laughed Kudai Kam. “So understand. It used to be called a planetary effect in other cultures because every human and every phenomenon represented the effect of a certain planet of the Solar system, where each planet was a God. For Greeks, the Sun was Apollo, and Mars was Ares, Jupiter was Zeus, and Saturn was Cronus. Each force (and there are, of course, many other forces than just the planets) has its own Mother Beast”.

“Can you say that a Mother Beast is an egregore or energy field?” asked Saosh Yant.

“I think so, yes”, said the shaman.

Polytheism

“Why do the people from Greece and India have so many gods, but shamans have only four?” asked Saosh Yant.

“Because there are only four main forces that drive the whole world. The supreme ruling power is Tengri, and then there are the lesser powers; Ulgen is a creating power, Umai is a saving power, and Erlik is a destructive power. Each shamanic God has sons and daughters, all of whom are assigned different tasks. This distributes the forces more specifically. So there are actually as many Gods in shamanism as in Hinduism or the Greek culture.”

“Tell me, Kudai Kam, how to inspire an object with a spirit?” asked Saosh Yant.

“It’s not easy”. “Tell me!”

“It’s a whole shamanic mystery. At first, the shaman should call the spirit-helpers, and then, with their assistance and the ancestor shaman’s help, they will address the God whose help they need and tell them about their request”.

“What kind of request?”

“For example, if they want to attract a baby’s soul or the spirit of wealth, they will call Umai. The Goddess can give it immediately or may require a sacrifice if, for some reason, there are some obstacles or difficulties. The shaman fulfils her order and brings a sacrifice. The Goddess will give them what they want when they ask the second time. She can also give it directly to the person the shaman is taking care of. Take your jew’s harp and start playing with a strong intention to attract the spirit-helpers. When you see a spirit in front of your inner screen, ask them to enter this object”. Kudai Kam showed Saosh Yant an iron pendant.

“Why this one?” asked Saosh Yant.

“It is used as an ornament for a tambourine. It should be hung on a string”, explained the shaman. “When you play the tambourine, the spirit will come and enter your tambourine. And when you have many spirits around you, you will hang those same ornaments on your shamanic headwear and outfit so that the spirits can stay with you and help you during the ritual of the shamanic journey . The more magic objects the shaman has on their tambourine and costume, the stronger they are”.

Jew’s Harp Lesson

Kudai Kam explained to Saosh Yant exactly how to invoke the spirits and

play the jew's harp .

"First of all, take the jew's harp in your hands and grasp it with your teeth. Breathe through your nose only, not your mouth. Hit the steel tongue carefully. Listen to the sound. Become the vibration itself".

Saosh tried. The jew's harp gently responded to his touch.

"Good. Now you should understand three very important things". "What are they?"

"First, the jew's harp sounding body is your own head. Its tongue is your vocal cords. The jew's harp will be able to sing many different melodies that are formed by the movements of your tongue and lips, the changing of volume in your head and throat, and different ways of pronouncing different sounds. Have you tried it before?"

"Yes, I have. When I was little". "It's good, but not enough". "What else should I know?"

"Rule number two: you should SEE everything you that PLAY. You should see nature, the endless fields and forests, the animals that you are asking to help you... You should see the spirits of nature – the water, fire, forest, air, and all things in nature. Make them come alive with sound!"

"How?"

"Try to make sounds that are similar to these animals' voices and the voices of the spirits. Be the voice of a wolf, a grouse, a coyote, a fox, a crow, or a bear. Merge with them. Look at their images and learn how to speak their languages".

"I'm actually not that bad at it, though I can't do a bear and a wolf yet". "It's ok. You'll learn soon. But remember the most important rule". "Which one?"

"The THIRD rule, the most important rule, is that you should BECOME everything you see and do. You should understand it deeply. You should feel completely immersed in what you are doing, disappearing in it as if you are no longer there. You should reach the state where you feel a perfect fusion of yourself with everything you see and do. Your persona (self) should disappear! Then the spirits will come to you, help you, and give you what you want! Do you understand?"

"Yes, Kudai Kam, I'll try my best". "Come on then and start".

Saosh Yant began his ritual.

Spiritualizing an Object

"Oh, spirits!" Saosh Yant pronounced invitingly. "Who wants to help me to do good things for people? Come to me!"

Saying it with all his heart and feeling a strong and powerful intention, Saosh Yant put the jew's harp to his lips and started to play, trying to do it

exactly how Kudai Kam had told him to.

Mysterious and mesmerizing sounds filled the chaadyr. It seemed like the entire space started to vibrate, synchronizing with the vibration of the jew's harp. The forest spirits came to help the young shaman. A wolf passed by furtively, and then a grouse went flying past. A fox and a little ginger rogue ran by in the dark.

"Spirits of the forest, oh powerful spirits, my helpers! Help me find the spirit I need to attract into this object!"

"Ok, I'll help you", said the fox.

"Yes, I'll help you", replied the coyote. "I'll do, I'll do!" belled the grouse.

"As you wiiiiish!" howled the wolf.

After some time, Saosh Yant saw a spiralling brown silhouette with an elliptical shape. It was barely visible in the shimmering light of the fire in the hearth. It was alive and pulsing. It seemed that it was breathing. The spirals grew narrower at the ends and wider in the centre. It was rotating clockwise. It had multiple dazzling turquoise eyes along the whole length of the spirals. They were looking at him from an otherworldly and incomprehensible abyss. Each eye was looking both at him and around him at the same time. The young man felt a bit awkward as if the spirit was looking through him. He didn't succumb to fear and started a conversation with the spirit.

"What's your name," Saosh Yant asked in his thoughts. "Shagyr", replied the spirit.

"What can you do?"

"I can see things that you cannot with your physical vision", he said, his turquoise eyes gleaming. "I can help you to find the right way and guide you. I can foresee dangers and bring you luck. I can make a path for you in good places and see the past and the future".

"Good. Please, Shagyr, move into my Object", Saosh Yant said in his thoughts.

The figure came closer to the young shaman and his Object.

"It will be your place. It will be your new home", Saosh Yant continued to talk to the spirit mentally.

Shagyr turned into a shining whirlwind and entered the Object.

All the sounds disappeared, and a dense and springy silence fell over the chaddyr. The young man looked at his teacher inquiringly.

"Well done!" Kudai Kam said encouragingly. "If you continue like this, you'll have a whole cortege of spirits soon. You are going to do great things!"

"I will!"

"Hang this pendant on the string of your tambourine. This spirit will be with you always, and you can ask him for help any time you need it".

"So cool!" Saosh Yant exclaimed cheerfully.

“Wait, don’t get too excited yet. There’s still a lot of hard work to do”.

Fairy Tales for Children or Shamanic Flight

“It looks like Aladdin’s magic lamp”, Saosh Yant said.

“Yes”, agreed Kudai Kam. “The difference is that you should have a particular spirit-helper for every wish that you have. The idea is the same. As soon as you start the ritual and invoke the spirit, it comes out of the object in the exact same manner as the djinn comes out of the bottle and makes your wishes come true”.

“I’ve been thinking....” Saosh Yant said pensively.

“Go on”.

“I’ve been thinking about the tales....”

“What’s bothering you?”

“They are so similar to these shamanic rituals, like a shamanic journey . There are always some strange animals, some kind of spirit-helper that help humans. A human in a fairy tale is constantly fighting some monsters that look like the ones from Erlik’s kingdom. There are even stories with a bridge as narrow as a hair, and a character should cross it to reach the other side of a burning river of fire. And what about the more recent fairy tales? Rapunzel was imprisoned in a tower by a wicked fairy. And do you know Shrek? It’s the same story. A princess is living in a tower, guarded by a dragon, and waiting for a prince to come and save her. Don’t you think this is all some kind of symbolism?” “You are absolutely right!” Kudai Kam laughed. He was laughing the sincere and vibrant laugh again. “Lots of the plots of fairy tales refer to the ritual of a shamanic journey. They turned it into a love story to make it understandable for ordinary people. Each fairy tale hides a shamanic ritual behind it. Fairy tales often tell a story about how Koschei, or a dragon, or another evil character, either male or female, abduct a bride from her groom”.

“What does it actually mean?”

“It means that Erlik’s worshippers from his kingdom of destruction abduct a soul and take it down to the underworld. This person might get sick... or some other misfortune can happen”.

“Or they fall asleep. Like in “The Tale of the Dead Princess and Seven Knights” or other tales like that”.

“Right. And the prince (the groom) or, let’s say, the shaman goes and looks for her soul. Very often, he is riding a wolf or a deer – his spirit helper. They guide him on his way to Erlik’s world.

“Yes, I remember. Tell me, please, who is Baba Yaga?”

“Baba Yaga is an ancestor shaman or the deceased ancestor at the border of the two worlds. She helps a shaman to find the way to the Underworld – the World of the Deceased. She knows that world very well, so she can guide you and tell you how to fight with Koschei, dragons or other evil spirits”.

“What about the hut standing on chicken legs? What is that about, Kudai Kam? How do they say it in fairy tales: “Hut, hut, turn your back to the forest and your front to me”?”

“Baba Yaga’s hut is a metaphor for a heathen arankas – a shamanic burial place. Our arankas is just a platform placed above four trees. We leave the dead body there. Heathens built a special hut without doors or windows; that stood on four poles. This is where the image of a hut standing on chicken legs originates from. Baba Yaga often invites travellers to have some food and go to the banya (Russian steam room). This is exactly how heathens used to perform their ritual of communication with the dead. At first, they went to the banya to cleanse themselves and then to connect with the dead during the ritual feast. Very often, they had this meal near the graves after the ritual of sacrifice”.

“What about the old Russian tradition of having a ritual meal on the grave? In Russia, we even have special tables and benches on the graves for this”.

“Yes, it is also related to shamanism. But it doesn’t work”.

“I agree. But why?”

“Because a shaman should do it. It should be understood. The shaman who does it knows and feels the process very deeply. This is not easy. Besides, it’s nothing without a sacrifice. What people usually do is meaningless, it’s just an empty form. If you just sit there and eat at the grave, it won’t do any good”.

“Well, at least you will feed some hungry birds, animals or maybe some homeless people living near the cemetery”, the young man laughed. “I once saw a homeless person hiding behind the next grave and waiting for the funeral feast to end just so he could eat the sacral leftovers”.

“Yes, exactly”, laughed Kudai Kam.

“How can you explain this story?” continued Saosh Yant, “Koschei’s life is at the end of the needle, the needle is in the egg, the egg is in the duck, the duck is in the hare, the hare is in the coffer, etc.?”

“It’s a different plot”, said Kudai Kam. “It’s about the fight between the white and black shamans”.

⁷ In Slavic folklore, Baba Yaga is a supernatural being (or one of a trio of sisters of the same name) who appears as a deformed and/or ferocious-looking woman. Baba Yaga flies around in a mortar, wields a pestle, and dwells deep in the forest in a hut usually described as standing on chicken legs.

"Do they fight?"

"Of course! They fight constantly! There is a constant competition between the forces of Light and Dark magic".

"Ah yes. I've heard of this".

"Shamans have these fights. And in order to be unbeatable, a white shaman connects his soul to the place of Power where they get their energy from. This is where they hide their personal magic Object, a secret place for their soul. If someone finds this Object and breaks it, the shaman can lose their strength or even die".

"Really? It means that this place should be very well hidden and taken care of".

"Exactly. It is very bad for a shaman if their costume gets torn or ripped or their tambourine gets broken. It weakens their strength. Every shaman has a certain number of tambourines for life. Some have five; if you are stronger, you might have seven. When the last one is broken, you die". "Wow! So you can be performing a ritual with your seventh tambourine, knowing that this is the last one and that you die when it dies?"

"Shamans view this differently, for we live half of our lives in other worlds. Which is why the final trip does not scare us that much. You can almost say that we are happy about it".

"I see... So weird", Saosh uttered thoughtfully.

"The first tambourines are usually small because a shaman is not strong enough yet. The tambourines get larger and larger as the power of the shaman grows. Let's go to the place of Power and catch some stronger spirits".

"Sure! Let's go!" the young man readily jumped to his feet.

On the way to the sacred spring

They went out of the chaadyr and walked along the path lined with tall, slender evergreen trees and huge overgrown rocks with a dark green shaggy moss. The path rose stealthily and was rather steep. Saosh Yant didn't notice any of this, for he was completely absorbed in anticipation of seeing another place of Power. The path finally led them to a mountain pass where they could enjoy an amazing view of the nearby ridges. The beautifully sculptured ridges ranged as far as the eye could see. Each ridge had a unique colour. One of them was a delicate pink, and another was lilac. The next one was dark violet, then purple, with the last one being the colour of dark steel. This incomparable beauty, resembling one of Roerich's paintings, greeted the travellers.

"This is exactly where the artist got his inspiration", Saosh Yant thought. "His pictures are without question beautiful, but they simply cannot be

compared with the originals. The originals are the best!"

"Of course, they're better!" replied Kudai Kam suddenly. "How did you...?"

"Try not to ask too many questions. It's time to go".

The path started to descend, smoothly leading them to the mountaincreek.

"And the Snow Queen?" Saosh Yant asked. "Is she also from Erlik's kingdom? An erliken?"

"Yes, she is", Kudai Kam answered. "This fairy tale tells the story of the modern civilization that turned Kai into a person with a frozen heart. Love is disappearing in modern society. People live their lives listening only to their minds and not their hearts. People's minds are focused only on consuming, conquering, owning and fighting. This is why the world is about to collapse. The ancient cultures are extinct. Society is getting more and more technocratic and is consuming things at a very high rate. People cut down the forests, and the ice is melting; our environment is suffering. People are losing their roots and connection with nature. Our world is barely hanging on, swinging on a thin wire that can break at any moment.

"What is going to happen? Do we need another Gerda who will come and melt their hearts?"

"Yes, this is exactly what we need. Humanity can only be saved if they return to their roots and the shamanic culture".

"So how...?"

"Be quiet for now. We are approaching the sacred place".

They stopped talking and noticed that there were no firs anymore, just cedars. The path went down to a hollow and ran along a crystal clear creek, streaming between stones that were overgrown with bright green moss. They reached a big open space with a sacred spring running between the rocks. It was incredibly beautiful there.

Saosh's first tambourine

Having approached the spring, Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant bowed to its spirit, awestruck. After the ritual worship was completed, they had some curative water. It was freezing but very delicious and pleasant, especially after a long hike. Its coolness gave energy to the tired travellers. Crystal clear streams were spurting from behind the rock. There was rampant bright green moss around the spring. The water flowing down the moss was thousands of tiny drops sparkling in the sunlight. At the foot of the mountain stream of water hit the rock, crashing down and becoming a watery veil. The rays of the sun reflected in it like a colourful rainbow. It looked like a miracle!

"Look!" The Great Shaman whispered to Saosh Yant's ear. "Spirits are welcoming us! Ulgen sends us his blessing. It means our ritual will go off

well!"

Saosh Yant glanced around and was amazed at how beautiful this place was. Flowers were blooming everywhere. Colourful butterflies were hovering, flying from one flower to another, and enjoying the fragrance of their nectar. Bumblebees were buzzing. Hard-working bees were also treating themselves with the flowers' nectar. A warm breeze, carrying a pleasant smell of various herbs and wildflowers of the fields, was blowing from the meadow below.

Kudai Kam took out a small tambourine, which he had made himself, especially for Saosh Yant. It was a tambourine suitable for a novice. It was small and very pleasant to touch. It had a unique smell of the animal it was made from as if the soul of this creature was still there. Then Kudai Kam showed Saosh Yant how to perform the ritual of the shamanic journey, calling for spirits.

"When you are performing the ritual," he said, "Keep looking into the tambourine. Look as if you want to hide your face in it or dive into it and shut yourself off everything outside. Don't look anywhere else. The tambourine will tell you everything. Nothing should be bothering you. Listen carefully to everything it will say to you. Merge with it. When you get used to the feeling, you'll be able to travel everywhere you want! You will travel the upper worlds on the skis as easily as you travel in our physical world. Spirits will guide you. They will tell you a lot of things you'll never see with your human eyes. They will tell you things one can't even imagine. Every spirit will help you in something different. But now, you should start from scratch and invite a spirit to a magical object. Are you ready for this?"

"Yes, I'm ready", answered Saosh Yant decisively. "Then start".

Saosh Yant took the tambourine carefully, hung the pendant that was supposed to become the spirit helpers home on it and started playing. He was holding the tambourine in his left hand and kyamla, the magic stick, in the right one. He put the tambourine as close to his head as he could and beat it once. The tambourine replies in a long echoing sound. Then he beat one more time, listening to its singing attentively, and then more, and more... Then he caught the rhythm of the tambourine, beating it with kyamla. Full of intention to attract the spirit-helpers from the place of Force and mentally calling for them, he started the first mysterious ritual in his life.

The resounding beats echoed in the mountains, spreading around and brightening the entire space. The tambourine sounded as if it was happy to find the owner. It was booming and echoing louder and louder. The sounds were sparkling, merging, mixing and immersing the young shaman in the state of trance, where he was becoming the vibration of these beats himself. There were no more borders between him, the tambourine and

the sounds. The world around him closed up and faded away. It didn't exist anymore. Saosh Yant was no longer aware of anything around. It was not important anymore. There was a moment when he felt an outer space opening to him and someone's presence revealing.

Magic deer

The young shaman closed his eyes and saw a deer with golden antlers, silver hooves and ocher-brown skin. It looked calm and strong. Its dark watery eyes were welcoming and friendly. Its nostrils were quivering gently with each deep and powerful breath. The young man could hear it breathing. Listening to its breath and looking into its beautiful eyes, Saosh Yant somehow understood it was a friend. Or, rather, it was a live source of opportunities and capabilities he was looking for. He knew, understood and felt with all his heart that this strong and calm creature would always be there for him from now on. They will be inseparable. They will always be together, and the deer's force and power will always help him.

"What is your name?" Saosh Yant broke the silence.

"Ulma", the deer answered in a deep low voice and got down on one knee before him. "I will be your spirit-helper. I'll carry you to all the worlds; I'll take you to heaven, to Ulgen! I'll show you the world of the future and tell you many secrets. You'll learn how to predict future events".

"Thank you, Ulma!"

"Besides, I will help you to come down to the underground world, to Erlik. You'll learn the lower levels too, and you'll know things people don't talk about. You'll speak with the dead. You will speak to the deceased shamans and ordinary people. You'll meet your own passed relatives or relatives of people who will ask you for help. You'll be able to know family secrets and clearly see all the skeletons in their closets. You will see a family curse and know how to break it. You'll see what the dead are silent about".

"Great. Now move into your new home!" said Saosh Yant, pointing at the magic object hung on the tambourine.

The deer stamped his hoof energetically. The booming sound echoed in every mountain and meadow around, shaking everything. The narrow valleys resounded too. The wind blew stronger, and the pine trees started singing and swaying. The heads of the powerful trees began to roar in the wind. The deer turned into a cloud and whirled into the tambourine ornament.

Saosh Yant finished the ritual of the shamanic journey. He put the tambourine and the stick down. Then he wiped the sweat streaming down his forehead and looked at Kudai Kam, waiting for his opinion. He was

staring at the fire flames and didn't move at all. Immobile, like a rock, his strict face with sculptured features showed only strength and calmness. Silence fell over the place. Saosh didn't have the heart to break it. He was trying to listen to himself. His feelings told him everything was good, and the ritual went smoothly. Slowly he sat down on the couch at the hearth. He suddenly felt how terribly tired he was. His body was drained; the ritual seemed simple but had taken all possible energy from him. It occurred to him that being a shaman is not so easy. As soon as he thought about it, the Great Shaman's voice broke the silence.

"You are right, and it's not so easy," he replied. "But..."

Saosh Yant stopped short, leaving his thought unfinished. He was not yet used to being read all the time.

"It's a lucky day today", the old man tapped him on the shoulder. "You've already caught two spirits! It's so lucky!"

"Is it?" asked the young man.

"Sometimes, one should wait for a long time before you catch one of them. Sometimes one should try and trick them and use all of one's artfulness. A lot of personal strength and energy are needed. Sometimes one should perform a few rituals, sometimes – wait for months and months".

"Is it normally like this?"

"Not "normally", but it often happens to newcomers with weak roots. It can also happen to someone who didn't have any shamans in their family, but for some reason, spirits pointed them out. Someone can live for years without thinking of anything like that, but then suddenly they got a shaman's disease".

"What does it mean?"

"It means that this person acts weird and starts talking to spirits. It becomes difficult for his family to be around and communicate. Of course, people used to understand what was going on and took them to a shaman to be taught. But nowadays, such people are viewed as violent and dangerous to the society, so they take them to asylums instead for "treatment". They think they are "saving" them. But treatment can only do harm. Such a person will never become "normal" but will also lose the shaman's gift".

"So this poor cripple will just stay in the state's care and get his pension, without seeing anything else in his life but asylums".

"Yes. This is how humanity degrades.

"What nonsense!" Saosh Yant said, vexed. "Unbelievable!"

"There were some precedents on Taymyr when they took children from shamans and put them in orphanages in order to bring them up "as normal people". But they grew up and missed their roots and their families a lot. They hate the Soviet Union. They visit museums to see their father's or grandfather's costumes and perform a ritual at least once a year. Can you imagine that?"

They both stopped talking for some time, sullenly. Both shamans, the young novice and the old experienced one, were sitting there in silence, contemplating the fire in the hearth. A bit later, when the tension reduced, Saosh started to ask questions again.

"Tell me, Kudai Kam," he continued, "How exactly is it happening if a person descends from a renowned family of shamans?"

"Easy", the shaman smiled. "There are no difficulties about it for hereditary shamans. Sometimes the spirit-helpers pass from the ancestor to the young shaman all together. Imagine a whole crowd of spirits – sometimes you won't even have enough homes for all of them at once! Sometimes they show what object they would like to choose as their shelter".

"How do they let you know?"

"It often comes as a dream. If you see a magical object or a detail for the costume in your dream, you should take this dream into account and do accordingly. The shaman should follow the spirits' requests. They know better. If the shaman pays attention to them, everything will be in harmony".

"Tell me, Kudai Kam, do spirit-helpers always look like deers?"

"Oh, no, of course, they don't!" the old man flailed his arms at him. "They are all different. For example, I've got a little girl, and she is only eleven. She is so young and fresh. I call her Nastenka. She's got very sharp eyes! She walks around, watches everything, and notices everything. She knows a lot! She is basically my eyes. She comes to me and tells me everything whenever I call her. She is cheerful. When she laughs, her voice sounds so high and delicate". "What will she be like when she grows up?"

"She won't grow up".

"What do you mean?" Saosh was puzzled.

"She will always stay little. She is not a human being. She is a spirit. Spirits have their own laws.

"Ok, what about others?"

"I'll introduce you to them, don't rush". "But still..."

"Actually, spirits live very independently. Well, of course, they have this magical object and know where their home is, but, in fact, they are wandering about in all the worlds. They watch, they observe, they know everything. As soon as you need them, they'll be there for you. They will fly to you and tell you things. They will tell you where they've been and what they've seen. You will be aware of everything. They are your eyes, ears, and feet, they are your energy! Spirits help you so much. Without them, a shaman can't be a shaman! You know everything through them.

"Sounds awesome!"

"But don't forget one very important thing!" the old man, raising his finger warningly.

“What is it?”

“One shouldn’t touch these objects for no reason”. “Why?”

“Because you shouldn’t bother spirits now and then. Don’t call their names aloud. If they see that you are just using them for fun, they’ll get offended and stop helping you. Treat me with respect and talk to them politely. Call them only if you really need them.

“I got it, Kudai Kam. Tell me, what about those scientists who recently came here and asked questions? They wanted to understand, but they left completely sure that it’s all in our imagination. How did they come to this conclusion? What should I believe?”

“Forget about those scientists” Kudai Kam gave a wave of his hand. “You know very well that spirits tell us things no one can imagine. Shamans themselves are astonished sometimes by what they are saying! Let’s the easiest example: that man who got lost in the taiga. How could you “imagine” exactly where he was and what had happened to him? But spirits let shamans know where the person is and where to find him. And we do find lost people! Hell of imagination it is!”

“Right!” said Saosh Yant, excited. “Once, when I was little, my uncle Bolot was attacked by a lynx in the forest. He was riding a horse on a steep mountain path, and the lynx jumped onto the horse’s neck. He tried to keep it off, so it attacked him too. He managed to take his knife out and fight the lynx. He barely survived! He had to kill it. He got very serious injuries himself. The bites got inflamed and swollen. The wounds quickly got infected. Scratched, exhausted, bitten all over, he lost the path. He was roving around taiga until they found him. His consciousness was completely hazed. It’s a miracle he survived. But he survived only because people went to grandpa Mamush, the shaman, and he said where to find him! Did he also “imagine” it? Did he “make it up”? My uncle would have definitely died in taiga all alone if there had been no shaman to help. The shaman literally pulled him from the death’s door. He was performing rituals for several days to save him. He was giving him herbal medicines and healing his wounds with natural ointments. He cured him! After these examples, how can they even... “ Saosh Yant gave a wave of his hand, upset, and started contemplating the fire again. Kudai Kam continued teaching him.

“From now on, when you are going to perform a ritual, call your spirits one by one and imbue your tambourine and your objects with them. They will help you solve your magic tasks. They will tell you what to do and give you priceless tips. Now wrap up your tambourine – don’t let the ornaments jingle. Otherwise, spirits might think you are calling for them and waste their time coming to you for no reason. Don’t drive them mad, or they’ll get angry.

Again About Fairy-Tales or Who are You:

a Human Being or a Raw Material?

Saosh Yant carefully wrapped his tambourine up in a piece of soft linen fabric. The ornaments, isolated from each other, stopped jingling and froze, waiting for another ritual. The young and the old shamans sat down at the clear mountain spring to watch the beautiful and solemn sunset, glowing with multiple colours in the feathery clouds. They were restoring their energy after the difficult ritual. Any ritual of a shamanic journey requires a lot of efforts. Saosh Yant stretched his leg with pleasure. He was enjoying the feeling of tiredness in his body, feeling the new pure energy pouring into him at the same time. There was an amazing view over the mountain ridges from the place where they sat. The same indescribable “Roerich” beauty was even more impressive now when every mountain ridge was coloured in its own unique way, contrasting with the other hills around. One could find every possible colour here, from a gentle pink to blue and crimson or scarlet, purple, and even silver-grey. Further away, the ridges were getting darker and darker. At the horizon line, they were a bright contrast to the sun, red as flame, drowning in its night shelter. Only the lilac and yellow clouds very high in the sky still seemed not to know what was happening. Carelessly bathing in the splendour of the last rays of the sun, they didn’t suspect that beauty to be over so soon. It was going to an end faster than one could imagine. There was an atmosphere of magnificence and tranquillity in the air. It felt calm and quiet. Birds were no longer singing. The space was embraced with silence and serenity. All live creatures froze and kneeled before the all-encompassing opulence of the Creator.

A few minutes later, Saosh Yant reluctantly broke the silence. His visit to the Great Shaman was about to finish, and he didn’t want to miss a thing. He wanted to learn as many interesting and necessary things from him as possible. His youth and curiosity pushed him further all the time; he was eager to understand and explain everything. Also, he wanted to know everything the Great Shaman knew.

“Tell me, Kudai Kam, do fairy-tales also explain a human being’s development process? What do they say about the stages everyone has to go through on their way?”

“Yes, they do”, said Kudai Kam, looking at his apprentice approvingly. “Because a human being should save his soul from Erlik”.

“How?”

“This is easy. A human being should not be attached to the past. These attachments don’t let them move on to the future and fly to the other worlds freely. The past doesn’t let humans eliminate destructive thoughts and negative emotions. People get used to experiencing these bad things

every single day of their lives. Only if one pulls away from their past, it will be possible to go on to the higher world".

"Exactly as in fairy tales where the evil character is usually Koschei or Dragon, right?"

"Exactly", nodded Kudai Kam. "Koschei and Dragon embody the selfishness one should get over in order to save the God's love given to everyone at the very start".

"Are there no people who are evil by nature?"

"Yes. Every person has a huge potential. But the problem is that a human being is not exactly "ready". At first, we are all just raw materials".

Saosh looked very surprised.

"People are different from all the other live creatures around". "I'm totally lost", Saosh Yant shook his head, puzzled.

"For example, a horse. A horse can't be worse than it is. If it gets "worse", it means it will get ill and die. Or it will run slower, eat less, become short-sighted, so death is still inevitable".

"Go on".

"A dog can't become worse. It will also get ill and die. A bird won't get worse. A bird will always be a bird, otherwise, it will die. But a human being can become worse. A human being can go to the bottom. A human being can become a miserable alcoholic, a homeless bum, a drug addict, or a cruel, heartless murderer. A human being can stay alive as a disabled person, a mental retard or a hysterical woman. A human being can lose memory or even stop acting like a human but still exist".

"Is it possible to become better?"

"Yes. This is also what makes us different from other creatures. An animal can't become better than it is. An animal can't run faster or hunt better; an animal can't fly higher or swim further than they already can. But a human being can become better. People can learn unimaginable things".

"Like what?"

"Like, saving other people, travelling different worlds, knowing about the past and the future and many other good things".

Saosh Yant reflected for a moment. He remembered about some of his relatives in the village who had lost themselves into drinking. The difference between them and Kudai Kam was obvious and so huge – it only confirmed what the shaman had said.

"He is right. A human is only a raw material", he agreed in his thoughts. "It depends only on this human whom he or she will choose to become".

"On the human and his or her choices".

"But how... ah, I always forget you can read minds", said Saosh Yant, trying not to be so surprised again. "I keep forgetting you know everything".

"Do you remember they mention a special stone in many fairy tales?" the shaman continued when the young fellow calmed down.

“Sure! If you ride to the left, you will lose your horse! If you ride to the right, you will lose your head! If you go straight, you will stay alive but forget yourself!”

“There are different variations of what exactly was written on that stone, but the meaning is the same. A human has to choose. People have to choose all the time. It depends on your choice of what you will become in the future. A raw material can become a masterpiece or a spiritual drabness. This is the difference between us and all other live creatures”.

“Is it really like that? Do only humans have to be in this situation?”

“Exactly. Even spirits never change! They are young or old, cheerful and kind, or strict and strong. Some of them are sly and evil. Always. They can't change their character and behaviour, their nature and destiny. But a human being can. Only a human being can change. Fairy tales have lots of hidden truths. One should only learn how to read them. One should know how to read between the lines and see the deeper meaning behind.

The connection between nature and spirits

“Can I ask you a question, Kudai Kam? You were performing a ritual to cure someone recently....”

“Yes?”

“Why were you saying aloud everything you were doing in the Subtle world? Why did you need to perform for every character that took part in the ritual? Were the spirits talking through your body?”

“I was performing for the people who were watching me so that they could feel everything I'm going through and be involved in the process of curing. If many people feel the same, their Kuts will merge into one powerful energy bundle, making the effect much stronger”.

“Is it like creating a collective energy field?” asked Saosh Yant.

“Yes, because I'm not acting on my own. It is spirits who act through me. Their world is huge and incomprehensible to an ordinary human. But shamans see them everywhere. They are in every creek and on every hill. We can see Ayami in every single place. People's successes and failures, good and bad luck – everything – depending on the spirits even though people can't see it! Everything depends on their attitude. If a person does something wrong and makes them angry, they will certainly be punished!”

“I know what you mean. Forgive me these details, but a guy I know once peed on a fire to put it out. We were already leaving our camp. Everyone said to him, “What are you doing? It's wrong. ” But he was just laughing: “What's wrong with you? It's just water. Waste not!”

Kudai Kam shook his head reproachfully.

“We tried to explain to him,” the young man continued, “Spirits won't like it. They might get angry with you. But he said: “Let's see if they will!” So he

did. On the way back, he fell on a slippery stone and broke his arm. He was in pain for a long time. Doctors did something during the surgery, and the bone didn't heal right. His wrist didn't function properly. So they had to break it again to heal it one more time. So much pain. But then someone took him to a shaman, and the pain just vanished. Now his arms function as if it had never been broken. But he could have remained disabled for the rest of his life".

"This is how it works", Kudai Kam shook his head regretfully. "If you don't see spirits yourself, it doesn't mean you shouldn't respect them. The divine Choktal – the fire spirit – lives in fire. His behaviour showed his disrespect to her, that is why she reacted like this. One shouldn't even poke the ashes in a fireplace with a knife! It can make her angry too. If you want her to be satisfied, you should give her small sacrifices, for example, feed your fire with the food you eat yourself. You should treat everything around you with respect: Gods, nature, spirits. This is an inviolable law.

"Ignorance of the law is no excuse," laughed Saosh Yant. "Just like in the material world. Tell me, Kudai Kam, I still don't quite get it. Do most of the spirits look like people or like animals? Do they always look as unusual as I saw during my ritual?"

"No, they are all very different. Some of them appear in the image of people, like Nastenka, my spirit girl. Also, there are spirits of the deceased. Some spirits have really unthinkable images, as you saw in your ritual. Some of them come to shamans as animals. Everything's different every time. If a spirit comes down to a new shaman from his ancestors, the novice is already prepared to see something. In your case, it is slightly different.

"Do they have a hierarchy, like people? Do they have, like, a boss?"

"Ha-ha!" Kudai Kam laughed cheerfully, amused. "Yes, I guess they have their CEO. He is in charge of everything. But if no one performs the ritual of the shamanic journey, they are free to do whatever they want. They are wandering about all the time. But as soon as the shaman addresses "the general", he calls for everyone. They all come to him at once. A shaman talks only to "the general", and he organizes "a meeting" to provide help. Spirits come and tell where they've been, what they've seen and what's happening. They are telling things no one can make up or imagine. Some share knowledge about how to cure someone, and some predict the weather. Some help to regain a soul from Erlik's world when a person is dying or even dead. A human's soul can still be returned during three first days. But it depends on spirits. There are images of the general and his main spirit-helpers in shamanic costumes. A shaman cherishes them like the apple of his eye. The general is actually the guardian spirit. It can be either an ancestor shaman or Ayami. Smaller spirits, called spirit-helpers, can be spirits of deceased relatives or dead animals. They can also be

spirits of forests, mountains or lakes”.

“Do you mean they are somewhat like leshys, water spirits or mermaids?”

“Something like that”, Kudai Kam agreed.

“So strange!”

“But one should remember that no matter how strong a shaman and his spirits are, the general mood of the group of people watching the ritual is still extremely important. Whenever a shaman performs the shamanic journey he asks all the members of the tribe or all the villagers to come and join the sacred ritual. Spirits are always happy to have many people around. If they see many people supporting the shaman, they fully display themselves and protect him. People are always willing to watch the “performance” because this is where they can get some vivid impressions. Shamans used to fulfil the functions of modern technologies. We were meteorologists, we were the rescue service, finding and saving people, we were doctors, and we were even entertainment. Shamanic rituals used to give powerful impressions to people. That is why we share what we are doing and seeing during the shamanic journey . Our spectators start feeling the same things and show us their empathy. They basically take part in the ritual, and our combined energy helps us to reach our goals”.

“Is it some kind of 7D-reality? With every sense organ involved?” Saosh Yant asked vividly.

“Sort of. But the attendees don’t just sense sharper; they also start to perceive the subtle world”.

“Well! 8D-reality then!”

“If you want to put it this way,” Kudai Kam said condescendingly. “But this is not the point”.

“What’s the point?”

“The point is that I can gather all energy from the villagers who come to watch the ritual and send it in the right direction. For example, I can focus it on searching for a missing person or healing someone, etc. By describing the process, I help my spectators to take part in it. I help them to share their energy with me so that I could achieve my goal easier”.

“I get it! It’s like creating a collective reality, right?” asked Saosh Yant, his eyes shining.

“Yes, we create common representations of our thoughts. But in order to reach this level, people should believe in Gods, spirits and shamans. Also, these people should be those he lives with, his neighbours, villagers”.

“Now I understand why they don’t let strangers attend these ceremonies. It’s difficult to sneak in if you’re not one of them, right?”

“Yes. If the invited strangers don’t share the shaman’s worldview, if they deny everything, laugh at the rituals and regard them as nonsense, they can be a real handicap”.

“Yes! I remember once the shaman from my village kicked out a stranger

at the ritual. I was a child then and didn't understand what was wrong. The shaman got really angry, so the guy had to get out of there before it was too late, ha-ha. Now I understand why the shaman did it".

"Yes, a stranger will always interfere with everyone's mood. A stranger will always hinder the community from creating their energy field because he will be extraneous to the "body". This is why only insiders should attend the ritual of the shamanic journey".

"But I've also heard there are some "civilized" people who still managed to mingle with others and become part of a community".

"Yes, but these are rare cases. Also, don't forget that a person who managed to become a part of such a community had to leave his whole life behind, break all the links connecting him to the past and started pursuing a better path. These newcomers moved to the villages and accepted all their rules and customs. They had to learn how to live again, with a whole new perspective of everything. It does happen, but very, very rarely!"

Kudai Kam paused, looking reflectively at the fire flames, which were glistening on his characterful face, ploughed with wrinkles, looking as if it was carved in stone. The fire reflected in his bright eagle eyes. The Great Shaman remained silent for some time, then sighed deeply, as if coming back to his senses, and continued:

"Our ancestors who lived in taiga could see spirits. They were treating nature gently and carefully. Being close to nature, they listened to their hearts more than their minds. They didn't have this consuming, destructive, and incompetent attitude. They didn't think too much but saw everything that shamans do. They respected Ayamis and were afraid of making Gods and spirits angry. Now people are very smart and reasonable, but they are totally blind regarding the spiritual world. They don't understand that the day will come when they will have to pay for everything they've done, including bad attitude to nature".

"Yes! People leave so much garbage in forests!" the young guy exclaimed indignantly. "I just can't wrap my head around how they manage to do it! When I was a child, it wasn't this bad. But now..! All places approachable for so-called civilized people look wretched! They trample down the grass, pollute water, injure trees and, the worst thing, they don't clean the places where they camp! A couple of years ago, my friend climbed Mount Everest, and he was terrified! He says there's a whole heap of rubbish at the mountain foot; there are used oxygen containers and loads of other thrash. Obviously, nobody is ever going to clean the area. Also, one can see corpses of "unlucky" people on the whole route, as a silent reminder of their disrespectful attitude to nature".

"Those are corpses of people who treated the Mother's spirit disrespectfully. She is the spirit of the top of the world", specified Kudai Kam, looking at the young fellow intently. "You might also know that

spirits have recently got angry with people and punished them for their unacceptable attitude". "Do you mean the earthquake?"

The Great Shaman nodded his head, silent. "What shall we do?"

"This is just the beginning. If people don't give it some thought, if they don't take a closer look at their behaviour and attitude to nature, there is going to be a disaster. It's time to go back to our roots. Back to nature, back to ourselves.

"Are you saying," Saosh Yant asked, "that living in isolation, surrounded by nature and following their emotions and sensations, people still would be able to regain the state of mind which allows them to contact the subtle world and do magic easily? Does it mean their right hemisphere would more then?"

"Yes", the old man confirmed.

"So the "privileged" left hemisphere has resulted in many great achievements in science and technology, and, therefore, humans have a very high opinion of themselves. Modern people genuinely think they are kings of nature but they have lost the connection with it. People can no longer communicate with Gods and spirits; they've lost superhuman abilities ancient people used to have".

"Yes, it's true", Kudai Kam sighed. "People used to easily learn second sight, could fly up in the air and moved to different locations in the sky and on Earth. People were magicians, and the forces of nature were within their power. But now, a human is a total stranger to nature. People are hostile to the environment. Modern people are slaves to their wages, technical progress and other "benefits".

"That's true" Saosh Yant suddenly laughed cheerfully. "What if a human civilization disappears one day? Well, anything can happen. For example, some meteorites from space will shake the Earth a little or something like this. Satellites break down, and the Internet stops working. If it affects mobile control towers, the mobile connection will be cut off too. What if the electric stations will stop working as well? People will die! Some from cold, some from hunger, a bit later. Modern people can't actually do anything at all! They can't plough, sow or hunt; some of them have never even tried fishing, let alone communicating over a distance or flying and things like this! People will become extinct without their glorified technical progress, Kudai Kam! They don't even realize that it has turned them into enslaved people. But shamans... shamans will always live as they used to live, in tune with nature, and nothing bad will ever happen to them. I would even say their life would become even calmer without all this mess".

"You're right. Humans make their biggest mistake, relying on technology. They honour the abilities and skills of their left hemisphere and totally forget about the right one. They voluntarily give up their natural power

and many abilities and skills”.

“How can they regain their lost might?” asked Saosh Yant emotionally. “They need to follow their hearts, not just their minds. Emotional development is the most powerful thing. Our mind analyzes, structures and imagines things, but it is the emotional power that can really change lives. Emotions drive the world. A human being should be closer to nature and to their roots. A human being should listen to their body and learn to understand it. One should learn what their body wants and needs and see if it has any problems. A modern human being can’t know even the simplest things! For example, people sometimes don’t understand they’re thirsty. They don’t understand what food is harmful and shouldn’t be eaten even though it looks attractive. One should also know when they’re hungry, when they need to eat and when they don’t! These are the easiest things to know, any animal understands them, but people forget how to use their basic instincts. That is why there are so many ill and ugly people in the modern world. People are crippled by their own ignorance”.

“I know what you mean, Kudai Kam. One can hardly find healthy people in big cities these days”.

“And I’m not even mentioning more complicated things. The human body can detect dangers or sense luck, but these abilities are unknown to modern people. Even if they vaguely feel something like this, they would rather rely on their “common sense” and still get themselves into trouble”.

“Ha-ha, they really hope that their money or high-tech medical equipment will rescue them. Such bullshit. Nothing can rescue a human who is as dumb as an oyster!”

Kudai Kam smiled at the young fellow’s joke leniently.

“Technical progress is not always bad if the attitude is right. If people didn’t depend on it too much and continued developing their communication skills with nature (the right hemisphere) as much as they develop their logic and technical knowledge (the left hemisphere), then there could be a perfect balance”, the shaman said. “Then people would be able to switch between the two hemispheres and learn how to benefit from both modern achievements and ancient power”.

Across the Mountain

The setting sun tinted the mountains a gentle pink. The dusk fell on the earth. The sky was a solemn mass of crimson, and fleecy clouds were floating gently in its serenity. The gleaming vermilion mountains were saying farewell to the Sun, but only for a short time. Nature subsided. Birds quieted down. Even the trees seemed to be calmer. They were no longer making rustling their magnificent crowns. They were falling asleep too. An

overwhelming feeling of deep tranquillity and peace embraced the earth and covered it with a soft, warm blanket. The young crescent appeared in the sky, followed by its capricious companion, the beautiful Venus. She was a bright little star shimmering beside the charming crescent. She was floating through the evening sky solemnly and slowly, lightly and at ease, looking down upon all the superficial and empty things on earth, as if saying by its mere presence: "Everything is temporal. Everything is dust and ashes. Think beyond. Think about beauty. Think higher. Think about eternity.

After watching the beautiful performance of the sky, Saosh Yant and Kudai Kam went back to their shelter. The young fellow was not used to trekking in the dark. He had to mind his steps all the time and was constantly afraid of falling. His attention was focused on the ground under his feet. His eyes were slowly getting used to the dusk. The narrow steep path was going down. He felt it as never before: it is much harder to descend off the mountain than climb up. Looking thoughtfully at the ground under his feet, he pondered over the questions: "Why? I've always been sure it's harder to go up. But now it's definitely harder and feels less natural". He suddenly remembered about mountain goats with their backward knees. Exactly! This is why they run down any hill so briskly and easily.

"I wish I was a mountain goat", he suddenly thought. "That is probably why people used to worship different animals. Because they have special qualities that humans don't have. But now, humans believe they've "caught up" due to this technical progress and think too much of themselves. People think they are kings of nature now. But they shouldn't think this way...." Talking to himself in his mind, he was strictly following his teacher. He was trying to step exactly where the old shaman stepped. His eyes were gradually getting used to the darkness. His pupils enlarged. The hike didn't seem so hard anymore. For some time, he was struggling not to ask a question that had been stuck in his mind. Finally, he gave up and asked the old shaman directly:

"Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, why do we have to walk in the night? Couldn't we just spend a night in taiga and continue our way in the morning?"

"Of course, we could. We could!" he smirked. "But in that case, you wouldn't have had the experience you need".

"What experience?" the young man didn't understand. "You should let yourself go".

"What do you mean?"

"You think too much. It's not good.

"What? How is that possible?" he was perplexed. "We have always been taught that one should always think and analyze what one's doing".

"This is why your head is so empty," the old man laughed cheerfully. "If you knock on it will ring like a bell!"

"Are you joking, Kudai Kam?"

Saosh Yant suddenly realized he was losing his patience. It wasn't enough that they're already doing all these weird pointless things, walking in the middle of nowhere at night, instead of sleeping peacefully just like anybody else! Now the old man has to make fun of him! The worst thing was that he could do nothing in that situation. Taiga was everywhere around them, and he had to follow him not to get lost. He suddenly felt a sharp queer feeling in the pit of his stomach. It was so unpleasant; he kept walking but felt like he'd rather disappear from that place.

"Spirits got you!" the shaman said unexpectedly. "What do you mean?"

"Many spirits are active only at nighttime. The other world gets closer to us at nighttime, you know? That is why people used to fear going to the forest when it gets dark. They used to know that this was the time for the underworld spirits to rule the world. They were waiting for the right moment to catch you, and you didn't even notice how it had happened".

"But how do *you* know that?"

Kudai Kam made no reply.

"Ah yes", the young man slapped his forehead. "I always forget you know everything I'm thinking about".

Kudai Kam suddenly turned to him and said, abruptly:

"You should learn how to think not from here," he pointed to the young man's head, "but from here" – he pointed to his stomach.

"How is that?" he was puzzled.

"You should learn how to start everything from there. You should perceive everything from there. If you learn how to do it, no thoughts will ever scare you".

"I get it! This is why we are walking in the dark now. Am I right, Kudai Kam?"

"Almost. This is one of the reasons. You are struggling to walk now because you are thinking too much with your head. For what, though? Stop it. It won't help you, especially now. Turn your stupid head off and learn how to use your stomach".

"Of course, I'm happy to try. Can I ask you just a few questions more?"

"That's too many".

"Just one question then?" "Ok, just one".

"I'm looking at you and can't stop thinking about it. You are walking in the dark so lightly, so easily. I can barely keep up with you, but you are old enough to be my grandpa! You've got so much energy and grace! You're so vivid and agile as if you were a young man! And here I am, clumsy and clunky, stumbling over every root as if it was me who is old. Why? I mean, why do people waste their lives and treat themselves like a piece of trash? There was a boy in my class; he didn't fit in to sit at the desk. They gave him a separate chair, and he had to carry it from one classroom to another. He ate all day long – burgers, cupcakes, French fries, and what not. He

washed it down with some sweet soda, cola or whatever he had. If he needed to use a lift, he had to go alone because he was so heavy. This guy is not the only one, such people are everywhere, and this is only one example of ugliness nurtured by civilization. Why did it happen? Why have people become so far from nature? What can they do now?"

"This is not just one question," laughed Kudai Kam. "Still..."

"Yes, of course, people have become much further from nature. They cut down forests; pollute rivers, lakes, seas and oceans. What for? All for one purpose: everyone wants to have their own box made of stone. Everyone wants to live in this cell or, rather, die there slowly. They have forgotten that they depend on nature and relentlessly destroy it. But they pay back with diseases. Adults are constantly getting sick, and so are their children. Babies are born with defects. Many are born prematurely. Many women are not able to give birth naturally, so doctors cut them to take the baby out. All these things are damaging. People are killing themselves, and this is only the beginning. They are drowning in poverty, debts and loans, wasting their time in those stone boxes. They become slaves and live as if they were already in hell".

"Besides, nobody can guarantee that tomorrow you will still have your cell and your full-time job. They can actually find themselves jobless and homeless any time!" Saosh Yant laughed cheerfully and naturally, like a child.

"That's right. People would be much happier if they lived in yurts close to nature. Our ancestors lived like that, but now only a few people keep doing it. If people tried living like this, they would develop their super powers and could communicate with the Internet, mobile phones and other inventions. But this is not the most important thing. It's not critical whether a man has a phone or not. It's not critical whether a man has the latest model or not". "What's the most important then?"

"The most important thing is that they would be able to open their hearts to love and be closer to God," said Kudai Kam emotionally. "Your main goal is to guide those few who can still understand something closer to nature and save them from the disaster this wild world is moving on to".

Achieving Perfection: Infinite Experience

Saosh Yant and Kudai Kam were walking through the forest. It was getting dark. The last gleams of sunset drowned in the dusk and faded out. Night fell; a thick velvet summer night. The full moon was shining bright, shimmering mysteriously with its hollow eye-pits, mesmerizing the minds of the "other-worldly" ones; irresistible for shamans, poets and everyone in love. One could hear cicadas chirping all around. The continuous trill filled

the entire space, giving the feeling of joy, harmony and peace. The air was delightfully fresh. The smell of the river was coming up from the clove. The full moon was making everything look magic; there was an atmosphere of a miracle. A pure fairy-tale colourfully painted with a magic brush. The young shaman felt his senses sharpen. He felt as if the “settings” of his perception were turned on to the maximum. He felt his attention concentrating on the lower part of his stomach while embracing everything around him. He felt like a wild animal, and all his instincts, which had been drowsing before, were now aroused and awake. Nature started its work in him. He literally sensed everything around him. Every stone and every branch under his feet were now easy to avoid; he was light and graceful as a snow leopard. Sounds sharpened and became keener. Smells seemed acute. Everything became more tangible. The night was cooling down his burning skin. His whole perception and all his sensations grew bigger and brighter.

Everything became vibrant and made him feel ALIVE. He had never felt more alive in his whole life!

They kept walking in silence for some time. When Saosh got used to his new state of mind a little bit, he started his inquiries again.

“Tell me, please, Kudai Kam....”

“What else?” the old man grumbled, a bit displeased. “You can’t calm down, can you?”

“What did you expect? We are going to say goodbye soon. I need to ask all the questions I have in mind”.

“Well, spell it”, the shaman sneered in a patronizing manner.

“Does shamanism have a concept of karma?” asked Saosh Yant curiously.

“No, there isn’t. It is god Tengri who decides how a certain person is going to live their life. It is up to him to determine their destiny. He chooses what lessons and what experience this person needs to learn from in their current incarnation. Even the Russian word “destiny” itself, “sudba”, consists of two parts: “sud” + “ba”, which means “law” + “God”. Your destiny is God’s law. Buddhists designed the concept of karma because they deny the existence of God. They made up Karma’s law instead. They believe that people are rewarded for their actions. But it doesn’t make any sense because when people live their lives on earth, they are unaware of what is going on, so their mistakes are inevitable. How can anyone learn something if they don’t even remember their past lives? People are not even aware of mistakes they make”.

They went down to the river valley. The sound of the flow and humidity of the air made the scene look mystic. The river was shimmering mysteriously in the moonlight. The sound of the water stream was infinite. It never stopped. It never had its beginning or end. It gave the travellers the feeling of continuity and eternity. Everything was to go on forever.

“Besides, God doesn’t punish a person for their sins”, continued Kudai

Kam, walking down the stream. "If God wanted everyone to live right, He would have allowed us to remember our past lives in order to let us see the consequences of our mistakes. Or He would have made the world a better place. A kinder and a fairer one. But it doesn't happen. We are born unaware and have to survive in this world, which is far from being fair. We must learn God's lessons from suffering, pain, misery, inconstancy, oblivion and many other bad things. If there were no unawareness, people would not have been able to get the experience they gain during their lives. They would have known everything in advance".

"What experience do you mean?"

"All kinds. Futile dreams, self-delusion, world-delusion, jealousy, offence, anger, humiliation, betrayal and all other negative things our planet is full of".

"So why do we need all this negative experience?" Saosh Yant threw up his hands, puzzled.

"The thing is", said Kudai Kam patiently, "that there are no sufferings in heaven. And heaven is a human soul's true home. In order to get true sanity, maturity and understanding, a soul must go through these tests. These experiences are kind of hardening a soul. It's like tempering a blade. Perfection is an endless experience, and surviving negative things and being unaware is very important and inseparable parts of it. An untempered blade has to suffer when it is put in the fire. It doesn't like it either when, red-hot, it is dipped in the cold water. It frizzles, showing how displeased it is. Yes, it doesn't feel like it needs sharpening because it will inevitably lose part of itself. But without sharpening, it will never become a real sword. It will remain a rough fragile semi-finished product, no good for anything. Our souls are exactly the same. Learning unpleasant lessons, surviving all negative experiences and suffering, a soul becomes mature, steady, disciplined, patient and, of course, wise".

Saosh Yant pondered. He had never heard of anything like this before. Since childhood, he had only seen people talk about how horrible it is to go through miseries, illnesses and all sufferings. He saw people trying hard to avoid them. But it turns out people need suffering! He couldn't get his head around it. He felt that a whole revolution was starting in his mind. All his old concepts and representations were falling apart like a card castle, and he couldn't help it.

Kudai Kam's voice, so close, so familiar, returned him from the oblivion he was falling into.

"There is one good thing about Buddhism. A human being is responsible for everything and, therefore, feels more serious about their personal development. But they deny the idea that the intelligent life is God's creation. But give it a thought: everything in our world is connected. It would be even weird to insist that this entire world was created and is being

managed without a Supreme Intelligence”.

Saosh Yant laughed cheerfully.

“It’s the same thing as to say that a computer would miraculously emerge out of a heap of iron without human intervention. Emerge, indeed”, he was laughing from his heart. “When you really think of it, you do realize that the world wouldn’t exist without God”.

“That’s right! But if we do have the higher intelligence, which is God”, continued Kudai Kam, “it means that everything happens for a reason. The stages of every living soul’s evolution are closely connected with the huge process of the entire world’s evolution. It is the evolution of the planet we live on. Earth is a stuffy, crowded place where a human being is enchained, suppressed and restricted by their imperfections, ignorance, physical weakness and very few opportunities to change something”.

“You are right, Kudai Kam”, the young guy laughed again, surprised. “I could never understand since I was little, why can’t I just fly like a bird? Why does a computer count faster than me? Why can’t I swim like a fish? When I dream, I can travel wherever I want, visit amazing places and even fly. But when I’m back here... It is enough to twist your ankle a little bit to be bothered with pain for the next few days”.

“Yes”, agreed Kudai Kam. “It’s all due to the limits. Besides, here on Earth, we can live only in the present. But in heaven, in the spiritual world, a soul can easily travel to the past or the future and even affect them”.

“How is that?”

“For example, a woman is infertile”. “Yes?”

“When I’m in a trance, during the ritual of the shamanic journey, I go to heaven and ask Ulgen to give me a baby’s soul. Then I go back to Earth and instill this soul into her”.

“Into her? Not in the baby? In her womb?” interrupted him, the curious apprentice.

“Into her. There is no baby in her womb yet. I am instilling a baby’s soul into her. In other words, I go to the future and alter it”.

“What a miracle!” the young guy clicked his tongue.

“Or, for example, someone falls ill. Then I go to Erlik to see the past and find the reason for this disease: why was the Kut soul abducted, or why did the spirit of the disease choose this person?

When I know the reason, I alter the past, return the soul to its owner, or fend off evil spirits. Or I learn what I must change, the past or the future and what sacrifice to make”.

“Tell me, is it always necessary? A sacrifice?”

“Yes. It is inescapable. We are suffering or missing something because we are clinging to it. We suffer when we identify ourselves with something. If we sacrifice it, our suffering will go. Or we will get what we want”.

“I see! Does it work like interconnected vessels?” “Yes. This is how everyone

should live”.

“Can you make an example?”

“Let’s see. For example, someone is lazy and inactive. He is lying on the sofa all the time and playing computer games. He buried his talents and didn’t follow the way God predetermined, which is why he is poor. He doesn’t get what he could get if he made certain efforts. It means he needs to sacrifice something”.

“Yes, yes, I get it! He needs to move his ass and start doing what he is good at! He needs to use the skills and talents God granted you. Right?”

“Right”, Kudai Kam smirked ironically. “Another example: a woman suffers, living with a man she doesn’t love. She has to sacrifice this relationship and break up with him. She has to sacrifice the attachment. When God sees it, he will send her a partner she needs”.

“This is so easy. Even in my family, I remember there were two women, my aunt and my grandma, who lived with alcoholics. Drunk as hell every day. They were selling things from home and beating their wives. When I was a child, I was actually thinking all the time: “Why are they tolerating this? Always with bruises and scratches on their skin. Why wouldn’t they just leave their husbands? Everything would be good then!” My aunt was always wearing jerseys with long sleeves to cover her bruises. She was also putting something on her face to conceal injuries”.

Both nodded and sighed, frustrated.

“The best way to change your past is to review your whole life and repent”, Kudai Kam went on.

“What? Sorry, I don’t get it”, the apprentice interrupted him.

“Most people think it’s not possible to change their past. But shamans have a different point of view. We can change it”.

“But how?” Saosh Yant exclaimed, amazed.

“That is why we practice reviewing the past. A shaman helps a person reach a state where they can travel to their past. More than that, this person sees everything that has already happened as if it were happening now. They get a chance to correct their mistakes. If they hurt anyone, they can ask people, animals, insects and even plants for forgiveness. This is the space to do the right things. People can correct mistakes they had been regretting for years of their lives”.

“And is this... “accepted”? I mean, can one really correct any mistake?”

“Almost any. It doesn’t work only when a person is too self-assured. It means something is wrong with their conscience. Other than that, one can correct everything. They just need to really want it”.

“Wow! This is so cool! This is super cool! So many times in my life, I thought: if only I could go back there and make it better. But I couldn’t! And now you are telling me I can! Shamans can do it, can’t they?”

"Sure", nodded the Great Shaman.

"Tell me, can you also affect the future? The future is different. It's like something that does not exist yet", Saosh shrugged.

"It just seems that it doesn't exist yet. Future is in our present. We are programming it right here, right now. It might seem to you we are not doing anything, but it's wrong".

"Even here and now, hiking in the mountains at night, we are programming our future? How?" The young man was puzzled.

"No, not right here. But there are certain points in our life when the future opens its doors. A powerful intention and good programming, for example, on our birthday, can really alter our future".

"It's amazing!" laughed the young shaman. "A birthday is supposed to be a feast. Inviting friends, giving presents, eating cakes and drinking champagne".

"Yes, but did you forget that family and friends also wish the birthday person all the best?"

"Yes, this is the tradition".

"Yes, this is what our fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers did..."

"Well, why does everyone wish for so many good things but many of them are never to be fulfilled?"

"Because these people have no power". "How is that?"

"This tradition originates from the past. A shaman is used to initiate a birthday person and program their future. It was the shaman who had so much power and energy to multiply the force of the person's wish and send it to the Gods. It had to be only one wish. All the power of the shaman and the birthday person were focused on that one wish. It was unlike now whenever everyone wishes for everything at once".

"Yes, and it's very formal as well. Very often, people don't even think what they are talking about. They come to birthday parties just to eat and drink". Saosh even had to stop, bending over from laughter. The old man smirked, looking at him, and kept walking.

Meanwhile, it was getting dark. The travellers were relying mainly on their sensations and the sixth sense. The entire space around them was more sensed than seen. Saosh Yant started to think that this indescribable state of mind is the only right perception of the world. It occurred to him that what people see with their eyes is only an illusion. Only at night, when one doesn't see much, the world can be perceived as it is.

The river became wider, full-flowing, calm and solemn. The mountains, pressing it from both sides, came apart, and the travellers were now walking in a vast highland meadow. Saosh Yant wondered for a second: how can his legs move in the dark? He had a strange feeling of having another pair of eyes on his feet, making them "see" where to step. As soon as he started to try and analyze it, he stumbled and fell over.

“Don’t think of it”, said Kudai Kam warmly.

“Ok, I won’t,” Saosh Yant said, shaking himself down.

“The best way to change your past and future is to be in Tengri”. “What does that mean?” asked Saosh Yant.

“This is when people separate themselves from everything they are used to identify with themselves. First of all, it’s their body with its senses, reflexes, reactions and illnesses; their feelings with reflections, affections and negativities; their thoughts with their criticism; estimating, checking, and expressing opinions. Then, being in Ayy’s soul, totally free, elevated and released, people can look at themselves and their lives or other people’s lives. This is the moment when time can stop for them because they are in Tengri’s world, out of time, in Eternity”.

“How interesting! What do you need to do this?”

“You should be silent, still, really calm inside. There should be tranquillity inside your mind. It needs separating yourself from everything you identified as “yours” or were connected with. Then you will reach Tengri’s world, the Eternity, and learn about the spiritual nature of a human being. Setting yourself free from everything you thought was “you” will release yourself from all the material, superficial, insignificant things. Freeing your mind, you will finally realize you ARE Tengri yourself”.

Reflections on Karma

Saosh Yant pondered over what Kudai Kam had said to him. It felt like he was touching the Eternity.

Bright starts and the great Tengri’s eyes shone in the sky. Only now has Saosh realized how beautiful stars are! He felt as if he saw the stars for the first time in his life. He didn’t even notice simple things in his everyday life, and he was immersed in his thoughts, lost in his imagination and imaginary conversations. He didn’t notice the stars! He didn’t know they were beautiful. They are divine.

They were very different from what the young guy was used to seeing in the city among all the noise and mess. The moon had already disappeared in its night shelter, giving them all the space. Huge clusters of stars were hanging from the dark velvet sky. They seemed so near, so bright and easily accessible as if one could touch them with their hands. Saosh Yant was walking without looking under his feet. He knew for sure where to step. His soul was soaring somewhere far away in the infinite outer space. Numerous voices of the stars were whispering their mysterious melody to him. His soul was melting in the splendour of the night and was free to go back where it belonged – to the house of space, the temple of God Tengri. Meanwhile, they reached Kudai Kam’s chum. It was made of long tall poles

covered with animal skins and looked very authentic. Saosh remembered he saw homes like this when he was very little. The temperature inside a chum was perfect at any time of the year. It kept you warm in winter and protected from freezing winds. In summer, it was pleasantly cool, and you could hide from the heat inside. The young man entered the shelter and found himself in a dark, cool space. The atmosphere was somewhat peculiar. It smelled like herbs and mushrooms; the shelf above the fireplace was full of them. It also smelled like animal skins. There were lots of old unusual objects, and he didn't even know what they were for; everything created a unique microclimate in the shelter. The whole ambience gave a visitor a feeling of extraordinary tranquillity, making them detached from everything from the outside, everything superficial and hypocritical.

Kudai Kam bowed to his home, and so did Saosh Yant. They took off their shoes, had some water, washed their faces with water from the big container at the door, and went to the fireplace. The old man hung the gun next to the icon stand and sat at the fireplace. He struck a piece of silicon to get a spark, and a gentle flame started playing in the carefully prepared woods. The old man took out a pot.

"Hey, Saosh, get some water".

Saosh drew some water from the container and put it on the fire. They started to cook dinner. Kudai Kam threw a few pieces of meat, herbs and roots into the pot. He separated some parts of them and threw them into the fireplace. The flames greedily ate the offerings.

"Kudai Kam, why are you doing this?" Saosh Yant asked, surprised.

"It's my sacrifice to the spirits. You always have to please them if you want them to be nice to you".

"Oh really? This is interesting!"

"Take these berries and throw some of them in the fire". Saosh Yant did so. Fresh berries sizzled in the fire. "Good. Pestle the rest of them and mix with this milk".

"Where do you get milk, Kudai Kam?" laughed the young man. "You don't have a cow, do you? What about meat? We didn't go hunting.

"They are presents from the villagers. They asked for help. This is for the ritual I performed".

"I see!"

He mixed berries with milk and tasted the drink.

"Wow, so delicious! It's like yoghurt but so much better without any "chemical" ingredients. Such a good natural taste! Unbelievable".

"Ok. Now take a handful of this "yoghurt" as you call it and pour it in the fire too".

The young man obeyed. The flame sizzled, devouring the offering yearningly.

Then they made flat cakes, treating the fire as well. When the food was ready, they started dinner next to the fireplace at a small low table. There were no chairs, of course. They were sitting on the floor covered with animal skins.

They prayed and said grace before eating.

The food was amazingly delicious! It was fresh and clean, made from natural ingredients. What else could they dream about after a long tiring day of hiking? Saosh Yant, young and strong, was swallowing the whole pieces like a starving lion.

"Eat slowly, and there's no rush. We are not in a hurry. You haven't been eating for a long time, and your body needs time. Don't overload yourself.

The young man tried to obey, but he had too much energy, so he started his inquiries again.

"Tell me, Kudai Kam, what do shamans say about being rich? Eastern studies agree that if a person is rich in this life, it means he has good karma. Is it true?"

"Nonsense!" the old man laughed. "Stupid legends for ordinary folks. If it were true, then all good people would have been rich. They would just need to "correct" their mistakes and repent on time. As soon as you're done with it, you're rich!"

"So if a person is born poor, it is not a karma punishment? Wealth doesn't mean "accumulating" good karma?" the young man was genuinely surprised.

"Of course not. Didn't you see that poor people can be very kind and honest, and rich people sometimes can be really bad and mean?"

"Many times! This golden youth is everywhere on the roads, speeding as hell. Murderers and notorious criminals become rich more often than anyone else. If karma theory was true, it is them who would have been poor! But no, it's the opposite in reality! At the same time, so many amazing good people live in poverty, literally on the edge of starvation!"

The young man waved his hand, upset, and stopped talking.

"You see! Does it mean they have changed so much in this life all of a sudden? Does it mean a villain is actually virtuous, and the righteous person is a criminal? Does it mean the karma law works this way? No! No way! It can't work like this. Poverty and wealth are both just God's lessons. These are circumstances a person needs to survive. It depends on the person what they will learn. It is up to them to decide whether to use their wealth to do good or bad. It is up to them to decide whether to accept the lesson of poverty humbly or try to punch above their weight".

"Some of them get loans and then, unable to pay, jump off bridges or throw themselves in front of trains," the guy added.

"Exactly. But this is only a game of God. A human being should only try to accept this lesson and set higher goals, regardless of whether they are rich

or poor”.

Spirit incarnation

The dawn broke. The first timid rays of the sun penetrated the window in the upper part of chaadyr, where all the poles got together and lit the dead charcoals in the fireplace. The new day has come, and the world has transformed. The weather was going to be nice. It filled the young shaman's soul with energy and joy. He sat on his bed, stretched with pleasure and looked at the sophisticated decoration of the room. He examined everything from the bed where he was sleeping in the western part of the chum to the curtain at the entrance on the opposite, eastern, side of the shelter.

Saosh Yant was surprised to find out that all the objects at Kudai Kam's place had faces. A face was drawn on the pot. The friendly face with the moustache was looking at him gently, smiling as if inviting him to taste something delicious. There was also a face on the handle of a knife. It was strict, serious and strong-willed. It looked as if it was saying: "Don't touch me! I serve only for my owner!" There was also a nice and friendly face on a wooden spoon's handle. It was similar to the face decorating the pot. There were some weird circles and tiny tambourines, as small as human hands folded together. Saosh didn't know what they were designed for. There were also mini-figures and skins of various animals on straps in the middle of these tambourines. They were wrapped in felted cloth.

Kudak Kam came in, carrying a heap of dry herbs and a handful of blue clay, and interrupted his silent reflections. He had already been awake for a long time, fresh, active and energetic, unlike most people of his age.

Nobody would call him an old man, looking at his strong body and springy movements he made. He was moving like a young leopard.

"Wake up, you sleepyhead!" he smiled cheerfully, showing his bright white teeth. "The sun woke up before you!"

Saosh shook his head, flinging the sleep off him.

"Come here to the barrel, wash your face", the shaman said joyfully. Saosh happily dipped his face in the clean, cool water.

"Have some water. It's pure. It's different from what you have out there in your big cities".

Saosh had a few sips from a water scoop floating in the barrel and suddenly noticed that it had a face resembling a mermaid from old Russian legends. "Kudai Kam, why do all your things have faces?" asked Saosh Yant curiously.

Kudai Kam smiled approvingly. "This is because every single object should be personified and animated to make it help you".

"How does that work?"

"It should be animated by a good spirit".

"But how exactly? I would like to try this too".

"The same way you did when you were catching the spirit helpers for your tambourine".

"Yes, yes, I see!"

"Then the object, or, rather, the spirit inhabiting it, will help you. And the object will be your talisman".

"Will I be able to do it?"

"Yes, you will. I've already taught you a bit. The best way to do it is to go to your place of force. Then you should read a magic spell over the object very emotionally, putting all your strength and faith into it and sending a very clear message to the spirit about what do you want them to do for you and when and how to help. If you do everything properly, the spirit living in the object will serve you and help you in everything you do.

The young fellow dried his face with a towel, which also had a face. But he was already getting used to it. Fascinated, he continued to examine the chaadyr. There were some strange masks on the walls. Some of them were wooden, and some were made from leather or clay. Some were painted with many colours, and some were not. The expressions on their faces were very different too. Some were just terrifying, threatening. They had wide square faces with shaggy low eyebrows, flared nostrils and big round eyes with anger in them. Others had oval faces with beautiful, proportional features. They looked calm, quiet and even friendly. Some of the masks were laughing at everything, but this was not an open, cheerful laughter. It was weird, more cautious than joyful. All the masks looked alive. Too alive, Saosh Yant thought.

"What are they for?" he asked, perplexed. "These are the faces of spirits", Kudai Kam said. "All of them?"

"Yes. We need them to get hold of spirits. First of all, a shaman needs to let a spirit inside himself. The best way to do it is to put on a mask and act like the spirit you want to grab. Imitate them and their state of mind. You see, they are all different; some are kind, others are mean".

"Yes, I've noticed!"

"You should imitate their voice, gestures and movements. You should merge with the spirit, so you will invite them and let them "inspire" you. When you feel the spirit is in you, you will know how to manage them".

Saosh made a movement towards one of the masks to try it on. "Don't you dare!" the shaman raised his voice.

The sound of this overpowering voice was like receiving an electric shock to Saosh. His legs gave way beneath him, and he nearly fell to the floor. "There, there", the shaman slapped his shoulder encouragingly. "It's ok. I overplayed a little bit. But you KNOW now that one should not bother

spirits for nothing. Especially when they're not your spirits".

"Do they belong only to you?"

"Yes. For now, yes. You will have your own ones. Also, when I leave for the Eternity, my spirits will become yours. I'll take care of it".

"Thank you, thank you, Kudai Kam", muttered the young fellow, feeling timid. "Can I ask you another question?"

"You're really into this, as I can see", the old man said, burying the sneer under his moustache. "Go on!"

"Is it possible to learn to feel a spirit? Is it possible to understand their desires or how exactly to spell them?"

"It's better to be performed as a game". "How do you mean?"

"For example, when shamans come together for some big event, a feast or something like this. They often do it together, making it a performance. Pure theatrics. Each shaman chooses a spirit or a God and inspires himself with this God or spirit. Spirits start to contest and interact with each other. It's a whole mystery play. When such a masquerade is performed, it is easy to see the entire spiritual world view".

"Yes! I know these events! My father took me to those performances. He would let me sit on his shoulders and watch the play. It was really mesmerizing; I can't take my eyes off the "stage". I remember these parties very well! I wish we could have them now too!"

"Well, in some ancient cultures, they still perform. Not everywhere, but they do".

"Do you think it has anything to do with Halloween or the Tibetan Cham dance where people make a performance about all the pantheon of Tibetan gods and spirits?"

"Yes. It used to exist in every culture. Nowadays, only masks and the order of the ritual are still the same. The ritual has turned into a pure theatrical performance. People managed to save the form but forgot the content. Very few people on the entire planet understand it. Only a shaman can actually inspire himself with a spirit and control them. One day you will learn how to do it all! This unique art will belong to you too, and you will be the lord of spirits!

The Spirit World

It was getting dark. The night sky was shimmering with millions of whirlpool eyes, giving tranquillity and peaceful silence to the planet. Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant were sitting in front of the fire in the ancient cave. Back in the day, it was a campsite for ancient people. The fire was playing on brown-ochreish walls with dark grey petroglyphs. God knows who and when drew them here. They were priceless historical artefacts, the real art

of ancient humans. The fire kept flickering, and the walls reflected this restless light, making the drawn silhouettes live and move. Saosh Yant was looking at them closely. They were weird, these figures. Were they representing spirits, Gods or even some aliens? The young man could not connect these images with anything else he had seen before. He pondered. His mind was at a deadlock, unable to explain what he saw. He came to a standstill and stayed there. After some time, he put up with not being able to interpret the pictures and continued examining them.

There was a muscled man with a spear, defeating a bull. The bull was kneeling in the agony of death. Blood was pouring out of its wound. It was still trying hard to fight, but the human looked so resolute and triumphant that it was clear: the bull didn't have any chance to survive. "Weird", thought Saosh Yant. "Ancient people depicted themselves as winners, unlike modern people. Today people often picture themselves as miserable victims and actually enjoy this role. Funny transformation. But, on the other hand, how else could it be? Ancient people had to survive; otherwise, they would have been killed. They had no other choice but to think, imagine and perceive themselves as winners. And to be the winners!"

There were other animals looking like roe deer. There were a group of men with bows and arrows hunting for them. All of them had an erection. "Very naturalistic art they had those days", Saosh continued talking to himself. "They didn't hide anything. I guess it was a symbol of luck. Without male power, there would be no good hunting. Hmm! What if modern office workers and bankers drew such pictures before important deals? They could attract so much luck! No... I think it would never even occur to them that it could help. And if it did, they would suppress these thoughts, ashamed of themselves. Now it makes sense why there are so many unlucky men in modern society!" The young guy laughed at his own reflections.

"Are you having fun?" Kudai Kam sneered at his thoughts too.

"Isn't it just amazing?" said Saosh Yant, knowing very well by now that the shaman was aware of his thoughts, "Maybe 20 or even 100 thousand years ago, there were people who lived in this cave, and their life was completely different from ours. They had neither Internet, mobile phones, nor TV. They didn't even have anything like the shittiest radio station. Well! What am I talking about? They didn't even have electricity! Having fire was already posh enough. They didn't understand anything about thunder, hail, hurricanes and earthquakes and were terrified by them. But something tells me that we, modern people, wouldn't even manage to survive if we suddenly found ourselves under those circumstances. We would just die off like mammoths!"

The young man laughed cheerfully at the simplicity of the metaphor.

“Exactly”, nodded Kudai Kam. “Even though they were so “primitive”, they were aware of some things that are no longer available to modern educated “people”.

“What are these things?” asked Saosh Yant.

“Ancient people were closer to Heaven where they had recently come from. They could still remember their cosmic motherland. They didn’t forget their universal roots. They remembered the Mother Universe. Those people could see life in everything around them. They could see it in every stone, every creek, lake, river or waterfall. They could see it in the sunrise and sunset. They could see it in the night sky full of stars, in the sound of thunder, in the song of the rain. They could communicate with the spiritual world directly. They asked for a blessing, whatever intentions they had. They asked the Gods for help and lived in harmony with nature. Nature was everything for them. It fed them and sheltered them. Nature was their protector, supporter, and welcoming host. Ancient people knew they were only guests here and didn’t try to take advantage of the planet. They didn’t destroy nature mercilessly as modern people do. They knew that nature was their home, and they should just live here and take care of it. And they did; they were gentle and careful.

This is when shamanism first appeared. It is the first religion on Earth. This religion existed everywhere. It was known by ancient native Americans: Yaqui, Zuni, and Huichol; it was also known by shamans in Peru (aruntas) and even by kahuna tribes from the most distant islands, lost somewhere in the Pacific ocean. This religion did not have to be spread by messiahs and priests, as it is always described in traditional religious books. It was given to people by spirits”.

“By spirits?” the young guy was astonished. “How?!”

“Yes, by spirits who used to be able to communicate with people directly due to their open-mindedness. People followed their hearts, and it was easy for them to hear the voices of spirits. They could talk to them, ask for advice and do many other things. This planet is ruled by spirits; it is them who create all these hurricanes, earthquakes and floods. They make a good environment for people to live in; they inspire people with creative or destructive thoughts. They manage their actions. They choose the best time to do things. Don’t you see that all the events in this world are happening as if someone prepared a script? First of all, people invented the wheel, then gunpowder and only after that – electricity. It works for everything. Everything goes on according to a very strict order. Have you ever noticed it?”

“Yes, but it’s still weird”. “What is weird?”

“Weird that it depends on spirits. I thought everything is determined by the Gods”, Saosh scratched his head, puzzled.

“This is true”, Kudai Kam confirmed. “But it’s not that simple”. “What do

you mean?"

"You see, Gods are too far from Earth. They have other things to do, so they have a lot of helpers. They also have their hierarchy, like in the army. Soldiers don't get orders from generals themselves. There are lower-level inferiors to do that. Generals are responsible for the entire picture.

"So people are only soldiers?" the young guy laughed. "Yes. Does it make you feel uncomfortable?"

"No, of course not!" Saosh Yant shook his head. "I do understand that people are not kings of nature. There is a lot above us.

"It's good, you understand. So Gods manage the whole world. They watch what happens here and send their spirits to our planet to accomplish their plans".

"Who are these spirits? Do I know any of them?"

"As you must remember, there are four main Gods. Each of them has their own spirits. For example, Ulgen, the God of the Future, sends creative good-natured spirits. They bring luck and help people. They come up with the right decisions and help people to invent new things or create something unique. They also protect people. They are also called Angels.

"Are guardian angels among them too?"

"Yes, they are among them. They also know the future and protect a person from mistakes. They help people to make the right choices.

"Sounds awesome!"

"Goddess Umai has spirits of forests, fields, mountains, waters and other natural resources. She also rules the spirits of natural forces, which should protect their lands and keep everything in peace and harmony. Pagans call these spirits leshys, nixies, house spirits, etc., but these are not all of them. Actually, there are many more spirits than a human being can imagine. Erlik has a lot of ill-natured destructive spirits under command: spirits of damage, discord, disappointment, diseases and death".

"Why does he need them?"

"Because Erlik's function is to destroy everything created by Ulgen. So his warriors follow him.

"How disgusting!" Saosh couldn't but say.

"Yes, it is. But it is necessary as well. If nothing were destroyed,, there would be no space for new positive creations. Can you imagine what our world would be like if nothing had ever been destroyed and nobody has ever died. However, new things, people, animals and other phenomena of life would still emerge. Sooner or later, our world would have become overcrowded and crammed with things. We would have literally no free space left".

"I can imagine. This is what is happening with big cities where life is only getting worse. People from Moscow are so angry with newcomers: "what are you all coming here for? Moscow is not made from rubber!"

“Ha-ha!” the Great Shaman laughed openly. “Exactly. This is how it works in the entire world. The planet is also not made “from rubber”. It’s not elastic. Old things should be destroyed to free some space for new things. This is how it has always been and always will be”.

“So, what are these spirits who serve Erlik?”

“They are called demons by Christians, Buddhists and other religions too. For example, Larvae “vampire” energy from humans, disturbing them from the underground world. Devils make up bad luck and cause trouble. Mermaids make swimmers drown, dragging them underwater. Sirens lure sailors to death traps. There are also many other demonic creatures, and they just have different names in every culture”.

“Creepy!” the young man flinched, shaking the fear of himself, like a dog shaking off water. “Let’s talk about something more fun?”

“More fun?” the shaman sneered. “Like what?”

“Tell me about God, Tengri. What is he responsible for? Who is under his command?”

“Tengri Han also has his spirits. They are in charge of the evolution of humans and other creatures. His helpers are responsible for our spiritual development. They are Archangels, Seraphims and Cherubs. They are at the highest level of human evolution”.

“What do they do?”

“They ensure people are going in the right direction and not making fatal mistakes”.

“What mistakes are fatal?”

“Destruction of the planet and humans. Tengri Han keeps the balance between good and evil. He makes sure that there is always more light than dark. Otherwise, the world would have become imbalanced, and people would have killed themselves. But it doesn’t happen because Tengri keeps the harmony of the world. Tengri-Han is the supreme god of the entire pantheon. He is the father of Ulgen and Erlik. Umai is his wife. Besides, Tengri sends new souls to the planet. Souls of the deceased ancestors are also divided between four gods and serve one of them. Each soul is sent to Earth with a predestination to serve one of the four gods.

“Does it mean that each person has his or her soul from one of the gods?”

“Of course. You can see how different people are. Some create and invent and become interested in arts and science; they live in a world of the future and make it real in the physical world. Their soul is given to them by Ulgen. Some people make something: build, sew, construct, sell or heal people, which means they use their hands to make the world a better place. Their soul is given to them by Umai. Some people destroy: they go to war, kill, damage, serve funerals or even work as killers. They do “black” magic and ruin people’s lives. These people belong to Erlik, the god of destruction”. “Interesting”, said Saosh, “But how do you know which soul a

certain person has?”

“Only shamans can help. They can find out where a soul comes from and what this person is supposed to do in this life”.

“Awesome! Can I learn this about myself?”

“You will. Your time will come.

The old man stopped talking. The young man felt it was time to slow down and stop bothering him with questions for the day. Meanwhile, the water in a big pot on a fire started to boil and gurgle. The Great Shaman removed it from the fire and put it aside. When the water cooled down a little, he threw a handful of fragrant herbs into it. The odour filled the cave. Saosh Yant was still staring at the petroglyphs on the rock walls for some time until fatigue overcame him, and he fell into deep young, healthy sleep.

Saosh's dream

Saosh woke up in the middle of the night. A strange feeling overwhelmed him.

He had dreamt of turning into a wolf. He was the leader of a wolf pack, protecting an injured she-wolf with her cubs. They hid her in a dark wild ravine between the branches of an old fallen fir, thick and shaggy. It was late spring when the forest was all stained by the last melting snow, hiding in the shadiest places. Nature was awakening from winter hibernation, getting rid of grey, early-spring outfit. Living in the body of a wolf, Saosh, in some mysterious way, understood everything about the wolves' life. He was confident about what, when and how he should do it. He felt each fellow wolf next to him. He could smell, sense and hear them. He anticipated where each of them would go and why. There was a strong invisible connection between the members of the pack. They were keeping their space under total control. Everyone knew where the others were and what they were doing. Right now, the purpose of their whole existence was to protect the injured she-wolf because the breed's life depended on her. Propagation. He was providing food for her. He was hunting with the rest of the pack, chasing other animals: deer, wild boars or even rabbits. He returned and fed himself first, then sneaked to her shelter. He threw up half-digested food for her, and she started to ruminate on it. Blind, helpless cubs were lying next to her. He looked at them and realized that the whole point of his existence boiled down to one simple thing: make sure they will survive. He has to do everything possible to bring them up. This is what nature dictates to him. Its voice was powerful, and it made him act and move on. So he obeyed and went hunting again and again. It lasted for a long time. It felt like it lasted forever. He knew what each wolf was doing, and he knew all of them were keeping an eye on the she-wolf.

Suddenly some otherworldly sound attracted his attention. He turned his face in its direction and felt as if he was dragged into a long tunnel. An invincible Force was dragging him there, and he could not resist it. The next thing he knew – he was back in the ancient cave, awake...

The reflected lights of fire were playing on the brown rocks. Saosh felt pins and needles in his hand pressed under his head. He moved it and stretched pleasantly. He raised his head and looked in front of himself...

"Holy hell!"

An ancient man with an erection was "dancing" right before him, near the petroglyphs.

"I'll see you damned first! Shameless!"

"Don't swear, my friend", uttered Kudai Kam calmly. "It can attract dark forces. They are especially active now at night",

"Sorry, Kudai Kam. I didn't realize you were here", apologized Saosh. "Well, it was not even me exactly. I was not myself. I was the wolf.

The old man laughed in his cheerful and open manner.

"It's not about whether it was me or anyone else. But most importantly, not to provoke the dark forces. Understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Did you play? I heard the sounds of the Jew's harp, didn't I?"

"Yes. I was training your Jula to travel the spiritual world".

"Sorry, who were you training?"

"Jula. The soul of your flights.

"How is that-?"

"Easy. Who were you in your dream?"

"That's pretty nice!" the young man immediately caught himself thinking.

"The old guy even knows my dreams. Unbelievable!"

"Unbelievable, unbelievable!" mocked the old man. "So, who were you?"

"A wolf?"

"Do you know why?"

Saosh shook his head, taken aback.

"Do you want to know?"

He nodded vigorously.

"Because a wolf is your totem. A wolf is an ancient ancestor of a dog. It's strong, active, resilient and resolute. A wolf is capable of living in a pack with other wolves. A wolf takes care of others if they are in trouble but can also be relentless if they misbehave. A wolf is strict but fair, active and restless. This is what your totem is".

"I could feel exactly what you are describing! I wish I didn't wake up longer! It was such a wonderful dream!"

"All in good time. You'll have enough time to be in a wolf's skin". The old man smiled, watching the young fellow's excitement. "You were the leader, by the way! Not just one of the packs, lagging behind".

"Yes! So cool!"

"Ok, don't chatter about it too much," the shaman interrupted him. "I did it on purpose so that you could fully perceive the power of your totem. Now sit down and listen.

The old man took the Jew's harp and started playing. The mesmerizing sounds flowed around the cave, echoing in its narrow corridors, filling the ancient space. Saosh could sense with his whole body the unknown Power entering him, imbuing him. It was a wolf's power. The power of a strong, beautiful and righteous predator. With this Power, he felt, he would become unbeatable!

The sound of the Jew's harp started to slow down and fade away after some time. Everything went silent again. Kudai Kam carefully hid the instrument in a special case, wrapped it in a felt cloth and put it in his inside pocket.

"I see you are ready for another question" he looked into the young man's eyes incisively.

"Yes, I am. You know everything.

"Ask me then".

"You know, I can't help but be surprised again and again. There is a world where everything is clear. As soon as you get inside and start communicating, you will know and understand everything. You'll be able to do anything. You will be able to affect this world through that one. Well, I don't know how exactly to say it... It's inexpressible! But you know what I mean, don't you?"

"You are so funny!"

"Well, that's enough. Don't laugh at me so much". Saosh Yant was slightly disappointed.

"There, there. Everything's fine. I was exactly like you when I was your age. I also wanted to know everything. I was insatiably curious. I see it as a sign from spirits that I have you as my apprentice".

"Why?"

"Don't you remember your story?" "Do you mean the shamanic disease?" "Yes", the old man nodded.

"Of course, I remember. How can I forget it?"

Saosh leapt to the past immediately. He saw everything that had happened so clearly and brightly as if it was only yesterday.

Saosh's shamanic disease

Half-awake, Maria looked at the clock. She saw Saosh Yant and stopped by him.

“Hello, Saosh! How are you feeling?” she asked him, looking at him attentively, trying to estimate his condition.

Maria was a rare beauty, slender, with curly chestnut hair flowing softly down her shoulders and turquoise eyes. She also belonged to that true Moscow “intelligentsia”, the whole class of society, which is also rare nowadays. Her parents were doctors too. Her father has worked as a surgeon all his life; he saved people’s lives. Her mom was the kind of doctor who helped women give birth. She was an obstetrician-gynaecologist. Maria was caring, attentive, tactful and polite; she was always ready to listen and understand anyone. She was always eager to help or give people the needed attention! Attention! This is something people really miss in the modern era. When Maria graduated from the university, she went to Barnaul to get her first medical experience and then decided to stay there. She fell in love with the city and didn’t want to return to the fussy and stuffy capital. She left her “historical roots” without regret.

“What does she have to do with Saosh?” you would already like to ask. Well, everything! She was a psychiatrist. Yes, this is what she has wanted to be since she was a child! She wanted to be the person who knew everything about the human soul and could help anyone in need. She dedicated her whole life to this. Now she was looking at the young man from her “professional point of view”.

The thing was that a few months before, the young man had started to act strangely. First, he started to talk to himself or someone else, invisible. He was constantly looking sideways, running away from someone; when people wanted to talk to him, he withdrew in himself. He was even growling, looking at them angrily, frowningly. When the moon was full, he was howling like a wolf at nighttime, so his neighbours were seriously concerned. They even called the emergency rescue service and asked the rescuers to come and neutralize “the wolf”. Fortunately, no one believed their calls. They thought it was just someone messing about.

He was extremely lucky: his father found him and saved him just on time. After that, Saosh ran away into the mountains, then came back and laid unconscious for a few days. What else could his poor family do? They called a psychiatrist. Maria was already quite famous. People liked her and talked of her highly, both in Barnaul and in the whole region. That is why Saosh’s parent chose her. The girl immediately agreed to help them and came to their place to see Saosh.

When it turned out her therapy didn’t work, they invited a shaman. It was Kudai Kam. It was not the first time Saosh had suffered from these attacks. He really needed help, and they were willing to try every possible method.

It took them a few days to reach the hidden shelter of the Great Shaman. Also, they didn't even know the exact location. Anyway, they were lucky he was that close. If he was not performing a ritual for one of the villagers in those days, they wouldn't even have had that chance. The chances of finding Kudai Kam were always "fifty-fifty". It was much easier to find the doctor. Someone called her, and two days later, she was already in their house, where Saosh's relatives were keeping an eye on him day and night. He acted in a really weird way. Sometimes he kept talking to someone; sometimes, he neither moved nor talked for hours. His family was really worried. His auntie came up to him now and then with a small mirror in order to check if he was still alive. When she looked at the mirror, she misted from his breath, gave a sigh of relief and left to do her chores again. But in an hour, she came back again to check on him. It lasted every day from dawn to dusk.

Maria flew into the house like a light breeze. Finally, somebody came to help.

"Let's see what we have here," she examined the young man carefully, without even taking off her coat. "Well, the pulse is fine. The breath is a bit slow but still fine too. How is he feeling?" she asked Saosh's uncle, Kulun. "Well, you can see..." he shrugged.

"I see", she touched the young man's forehead. "How long has he been like this?"

"Since we called you. He doesn't get up at all. Before that, he was hyperactive; talking to someone invisible and running around".

"Okay. Please leave us alone for some time, Maria finally took off her coat. "I'll invite you in when he's a bit better".

The relatives backed off respectfully and left the room.

Now Maria was alone with Saosh. She turned off the upper lamps and left only the muffled night light on. Then she took out her MP3 player and turned on the music. It was pleasant, relaxing and rhythmical. She used it whenever the circumstances were not clear enough, but the patients obviously needed help. She called it "music of good affection". One of her university friends who shared it with her called it so. Soft, pleasant sounds filled the room with light and warmth.

"Let's see what you're going to tell me, my dear Saosh".

She always called her patients "dear". What's the point in working with people, she thought, if you don't treat them with maximum respect and empathy? Working with people and for the sake of people was the highest purpose of her life.

At the same time, she didn't think of herself too highly. She understood she was not a mighty goddess who could solve any problem. She believed in something higher than people since she was a child. She believed there was something much kinder, lighter and more intelligent than herself and

others. Her higher education and a degree with honours didn't make her arrogant. Her grandma taught her how to pray when she was very little. Deep inside, she realized there is a higher intelligence, a conscious Force that manages the world.

Before starting the session, Guyd, the girl, performed a simple ritual, which didn't take a long time. She sat on his right side, closed her eyes and folded her hands as in prayer and said quietly: "Higher reason, let me serve you! Let me dedicate this session to you, oh supreme Intelligence! Let me help your creation through your energy. Please help brother Saosh to gain the clearness of mind and memory and the power of his intentions back! Let it be! Amen!"

Then she connected with the young man using a special technique. She asked him to let her know if he could hear her.

Saosh moved the fingers of his right hand reluctantly.

"If you really hear me, please move your fingers one more time," she said excitedly.

Saosh made a slight movement again.

Obtrusive Guyd or Buzzing Around

Maria asked the young man to start talking to her. He pronounced in a harsh, barely hearable voice.

"Mam..." "What?" "Mam... mam..."

"My dear Saosh, could you please speak a little louder?"

His dry, chapped lips slightly opened, making a narrow interstice. He blurted out something almost incomprehensible:

"Mamush..."

"Okay, Saosh. Who is Mamush?" "My uncle"

Saosh breathed out and relaxed. Maria helped him to get used to the new state of mind and encouraged him to speak out. In a few minutes,, he could already speak normally, like in everyday life. Meanwhile, his consciousness was in a subtle state. His soul was talking to spirits.

"Please tell me, what is your uncle doing now?" "He is showing things to me".

"What things?"

"Spiritual world. He is introducing me to all his lands". The young man's eyes were spinning quickly under his closed eyelids.

"What can you say about that world?"

Saosh was silent for some time and then answered:

"It's huge".

"What about uncle Mamush's territory?"

"It's also huge". Saosh went very deep into his mind and didn't want to talk

anymore.

"Good. Thank you. What else could you tell me? Can you describe to me what is happening to you?"

"He is showing me the forest where I will go hunting". "Very good. Anything else?"

"He is introducing me to Ayami of the area".

"What is Ayami?" Maria didn't know much about shamanism.

"They are "who", not "what", you ignorant woman!" the young man frowned. He suddenly seemed strict and even cruel.

"I'm really sorry, Saosh", Maria said sincerely. "Please tell me, who is he, this Ayami?"

"You really know nothing! Don't ask me again if you don't want to learn!" Saosh roared. His face went red, and all his muscles strained. "She is the most beautiful woman I have ever met in my life!"

Maria has always been ready for any turn of events, but this kind of behaviour from someone whom she mistakenly regarded as her patient seemed very weird to her. The way this man spoke was really rude. But she reminded herself it was a therapy session and said as gently as she could:

"Well, dear Saosh. Please tell me about this woman then". "She is magnificent. She is beautiful...."

"Good. What else?"

"She has a royal stature; she is noble. She has a plait down to her ankles. Her eyes are bottomless. Her voice sounds like a full-flowing river. She is very beautiful and strict. There is no other beauty like her on the entire Earth!"

"Go on".

"Everything around me exists because of her. These mountains, and trees, and rivers. Everything that makes these lands live. Every living creature – animals, birds, fish, insects, herbs, everything is in her power".

"Have you finished?" "No".

"What else do you want to say?" "She is my wife".

This statement was really weird. However, Maria didn't show any sign of surprise. She listened to everything he said to her carefully and respectfully. She was actually treating all her patients like this. She understood that everything people say can mean a lot for their therapy.

"Tell me, Saosh, what else is happening with you?" "Mamush is telling me where some things are located". "What, for example?"

"For example, where my power animal is". "Okay. Tell me about it".

"We are following her now. It's a deer. She can sense us... So we are trying not to scare her. We are going to her downwind. She is going to be my power animal soon".

"Good. What else can you tell me?"

"Everything is fine. Don't worry about me. I don't need help". The young

man was in a state of mind which let him know exactly what Maria was feeling. "You worry too much. It's not worth it...."

Maria was very surprised at these words. For the first time in her practice, a patient was guiding her and reading her thoughts. Automatically, she continued to do her "job".

"Can you tell me something else?"

Saosh sighed. There was a clear intonation of indulgence in this sigh, as he was condescending to a child.

"What else would you like to know, Maria?" he asked with a slight reproach.

"What else is happening?" the girl's voice gave way a little bit. "Mamush is showing me my cradle".

"What does that mean?"

"It's a place where my Tyn-Bura – my soul of shamanic ecstasy – will rest".

"Can you describe this place?"

Saosh didn't reply. His eyebrows raised a bit as if he was surprised, but then his face became strict and uncompromising again.

Maria felt like she was on the verge of something forbidden. She was stepping into an area where she was not allowed. But she thought she had followed her sensibility and asked another awkward "therapeutical" question.

"Can you describe this place?"

Saosh kept silent for a few more seconds. Then he opened his dry lips and said in a cold metallic voice:

"ONE MUST NOT TALK ABOUT IT... ONE MUST NOT!!!"

He shook his head, and then his face relaxed again. He looked completely indifferent. The expression on his face was clearly saying he was not willing to talk any longer.

Maria sat there a bit longer, taken aback. She didn't understand what to do next. Her instincts told her it was time to finish the session. This time she decided to follow her instincts.

"Ok, Saosh. Please, one more question. Would you like to finish our conversation?"

"IT'S TIME... IT'S TIME..." Saosh shut his lips tight and let his body relax. Normally, Maria asked her patients how they felt after the session and then guided them out of this trance using her magic key. But this time, she understood and felt that the inner work had not yet been finished. Apparently, Saosh had a much more powerful and sophisticated "therapist" than herself. The young man was obviously guided by an experienced shaman, plus he was his close relative. At the same time, she realized they needed Kudaï Kam to help.

"Well," she muttered incoherently. "Be there as long as you need. You will

find your way out when you know it's time to go back".

"Don't worry, daughter", he said in a patronizing manner. "Go have some rest. It's enough for you".

"Daughter?!" she couldn't believe her ears. "Daughter! We are the same age! Well, wait a second... He is even younger than me! A few years younger! Why is calling me "daughter"?!"

There were lots of contradictions, but Maria decided to finish the session, which was actually not more than an exhausting buzzing of fly around his ear for Saosh. She only covered him with a blanket and opened the window to let some fresh air inside. Then she turned off the lights and left.

Saosh was lying like this for another thirty-six hours. The aunt still worried about him and kept checking on him with that ridiculous mirror to ensure he was alive. "What if he died?" she kept repeating again and again. Finally, Maria stopped her.

"That's enough! He is absolutely fine", she said convincingly.

"Really? I can't stop worrying. I'm afraid. What will I tell his parents if something happens?"

"Don't worry. He is going to be fine".

"Do you think so?" the aunt wiped her sweaty face with her apron.

"It's not that I think. It's what I KNOW. Do your things. I will keep an eye on him".

"Ok, dear, please do. You are our only hope. We sent some people to find Kudai Kam, but when will he come? Who knows? Well, I'll go... I have lots of things to do!"

A day later, Saosh got out of his trance and opened his eyes. He took a deep breath. A beautiful girl was sitting next to his bed, watching him closely...

New Encounter

A week passed. Kudai Kam had reached Saosh and met him, but for some reason, he didn't really do anything about him. It seemed like the shaman was deliberately delaying, waiting for something. He was preparing for something or, maybe, gathering energy. It seemed like it was up to spirits to decide when to act. He let the events run their course.

The young psychiatrist didn't feel that way, though. Maria was eager to keep in touch with the young guy, trying her best to help him. It was also about her professional ambitions. She didn't want to give up so easily at the first strange experience. That is why she was still visiting him every day, observing him, asking him questions.

"How are you feeling?" she asked him again.

"Much better now," he breathed it out and sat in his bed. He sounded

exhausted. "Could you please make some tea for me?"

"Sure", said the girl. "Let's go to the kitchen".

They turned on the upper lights. Maria put the kettle on the stove. Saosh looked tired, even shattered. He looked somewhat different. He looked lost. The way he looked made Maria worry again. As a psychiatrist, she started to fear again: what if it's just a mental disorder?

"Saosh, how are you feeling?" she asked her question again.

"Don't worry, Maria. I'm not going crazy. It's only because I'm becoming a kam".

He relaxed a bit and started to tell her his story, sipping hot tea.

"Masha, do you remember I went to my relative's house after we said goodbye near my house the day before yesterday? Kudai Kam and you went to another house. He didn't explain to me what to do. He told me he would see me later, but didn't say where or when. I was walking in the street, angry and upset. At first, I was annoyed because Kudai Kam didn't actually tell me anything since he met me. I hoped he would immediately start teaching me how to be a kam. I was expecting rituals and initiations; I was looking forward to explanations. I was eager to learn how to do things and repeat after him. I was going to start this long training and study until my worldview fully changes, until I become a superhuman. At least, this is what I was used to think about, basing things upon I read and heard. But he was looking at me as if I didn't mean anything, as if I had absolutely nothing to do with it. He was looking at me as if I was nothing! I was scared he would forget about me and leave me somewhere in the street. I was really angry. I had a strange feeling of being beaten all over. My head was burning, and my emotions didn't let me think about anything else.

My anger was followed by a very strange state of mind, which I can't describe, but I recognized it immediately. I was there before when I heard the voice of Mamush, my uncle, and was trying to get rid of it. But this time, it was much stronger. I was out, walking when I heard his voice again. He ordered: "Run to the mountains!"

I knew it was absolutely mad, but the order was impossible to defy. I've never heard anything more powerful. It was night completely dark around me apart from a few houses with the lights still on. Our town is surrounded by mountains and forest, which seemed like a black scary wall to me. I was peering into that darkness, sensing the dangers hiding in there. I heard the voices of wild animals wandering around at night. But then I heard my uncle's voice again, which overwhelmed my fears and anxiety. He shouted so loud that his words penetrated my mind through the fire, still burning my head: "Go to the mountains!"

Even though I spent my early years in the village (before my parents moved to the city) and often went there for school holidays, I was still very scared of walking alone in the darkness. I started running. I was thinking that

maybe the physical movement would help me to recover. But Mamush's voice followed me and guided me. I didn't even notice turning to the mountains instead of reaching the houses with lights.

Very soon, I found myself in the mountain forest. The town was left far below me. My fear was so strong; that it didn't let me stop for a second. I felt like if I stopped for a moment, either spirits or animals would find me and kill me immediately. I kept running. I went so far into the forest that when I looked back, I couldn't see the lights anymore. Finally, I had to stop because I just couldn't run any longer.

As soon as I stopped, I heard the quiet sound of someone's steps near me. It terrified me so much that I pulled myself together and started running again, as fast as I could. I felt I could die at any moment. I couldn't imagine there was another option. It had to finish with my death, I thought.

It might sound weird to you, but I was absolutely sure there was no way back for me to the normal world. I no longer realized the time. I can't tell you how many hours I ran in the mountains, turning, jumping, hopping, shouting, and losing control over my actions. There were short flashes of clear consciousness when I suddenly thought: isn't it weird that I haven't yet fallen or injured myself in the least? Finally, I felt complete indifference to my own fate. Nothing scared me anymore. At that moment, I heard Mamush's voice saying:

"Calm down. Lie on the ground, he ordered gently.

It was almost dawn, and there was already enough light to see where I was. I was shocked at the thought that I had spent the whole night like that. I noticed I was in a different place. The snow was melting. I couldn't think about anything anymore, so I laid down on the ground and fell asleep in my sheepskin coat.

"Don't ruin the grass! The grass is the planet's hair!" Those were the last words I remembered.

I woke up to the sound of soft voices next to me. It was a bright morning, and the sun was high in the clear blue sky. I saw Kudai Kam and someone else – a stranger. They were standing very close to me. When they saw me awake, they suddenly started to laugh at me. I got very angry, and they could see it on my face. They became serious again, and Kudai Kam started to talk:

"I know. Spirits were planning to bring you to the test yesterday, but I didn't want to interfere and warn you. They had to do what they did before letting me meet you properly".

"What do you mean by testing?" I asked.

"This is what we say about the occasions when spirits make a new Kam run around and dance for the whole night," he explained calmly.

"Does it happen to everyone who becomes a Kam?" I asked, relieved.

"Why, would you like to be special?" he said ironically. "Don't even hope! It doesn't happen. You will be very special for ordinary people but not for other Kams. You will become one of us very soon.

I was still a bit annoyed with him, but I did understand that he was there to help me, so I paid all my attention.

"Your uncle came to me before he died. He said you would ask for help one day. He also asked me to teach you some things. He was sure you would come but, to be honest, I thought he was mistaken. It happens so rarely that a person leaves for big city life, lives and works there, and then still becomes a Kam. Well, in your case, your uncle was right. But I'm still not entirely sure about your intentions. Are you fully aware of what you are going to do?"

"Yes. I've made a decision. I want to be a Kam. " I thought a simple answer would be enough, but he kept asking me questions.

"Do you understand that you will have to leave everything you have in the city? Your job, friends, girlfriend?" he asked, doubting me.

"But I do want to become Kam, don't I?" I said calmly.

"I see that you do," he said as if estimating me. "If you become a Kam, you will have a totally different life. You won't have what you have in the city. Do you realize it? Can you accept it?"

"Why do you even ask me?" I started to get a bit angry again. "Even though I mentioned I have some regrets about my past life, even though I said I would like to go back, you know better than me that it's impossible. I will never be able to go back to that. Yes, you are partly right in your doubts because in some aspects I had this dream about a big city. I wanted to have a family and get an education. But I know what expects me there! It's insanity! In fact, I don't even have a choice. Of two evils, choose the least, right? So which one?"

Kudai Kam didn't reply and shook his head, frustrated.

"I'm sorry! Really sorry! I haven't made my choice just because of this. I really would like to be a Kam to help people".

Kudai Kam listened to me carefully. He seemed to be pleased. Then he said:

"Well, we don't have much time. First of all, I will teach you a few things you should know to begin with. All the rest you will have to learn on your own. There are just some basic things I have to explain to you in the very beginning. But some other things I know can't be taught. They will reach you sooner or later by different means. Your uncle Mamush was a very powerful Kam. He was a Kam of Heaven. Not all shamans can travel to the upper world. Not all shamans are allowed up there. But he could do it even in winter when the sky is frozen. He used his tambourine stick to break the ice and enter Ulgen's territory. I saw him going there once...."

Kudai Kam stopped. The silence was deep and overwhelming. They could

sense the presence of Mamush from the world of eternity.

"You might think," he continued ", You will be very different from Mamush when you become a Kam, just like every human being is different from another. But it doesn't work like this. One of the biggest mysteries is that Kam is always the same person".

"How do you mean?"

"Mamush, you or whoever comes after you, all of you are the same Kam in different incarnations. This is how lineage works. A true Kam is always a representation of the lineage. Each of you can be a different human being, but in terms of shamanic power, you are all one Kam. Your main task now is to teach yourself how to be open to Mamush's power and perceive it. You will become the representation of his power. You will hear his voice until it runs out. After that, you will have your own voice and your own power. But it requires lots of effort to get it. You are right, and you actually have no choice. Spirits noticed you; you've got no power to disobey them.

I didn't say a word, waiting for him to continue.

"Come closer!" he called the stranger, a local man from the Altai Mountains. He looked fifty. A faint smile was wandering on his face during Kudai Kam's monologue. He didn't show any interest in me, but when Kudai Kam called him, he immediately approached him and handed him a big bag. The shaman took a huge handicraft tambourine out of it.

"Mamush left it for you," he said and gave it to me.

The oval tambourine looked new and was very heavy with a carved wooden handle in a shape of a human figure. The wooden base was made from willow. A piece of deerskin stretched over the tambourine. The skin was unbelievably new; it still smelled like a wild animal.

"This deer will be your own animal. You will travel with it. We will help you to animate it now".

Saosh stopped and cast his eyes down as if trying to overcome himself.

"I can't tell you much about the ceremony they helped me to perform," he finally said, feeling awkward. "To be honest, I don't have a clear idea. First of all, they brought me to a strange somnambular state. Kudai Kam's assistant was standing behind me, holding my shoulders and swaying my body back and forth. Kudai Kam was making a fire in front of me simultaneously. The smoke was so thick and acrid that I had to shut my eyes. Very soon, I could feel my uncle standing behind me and holding my body. The next thing I knew was that we were hunting together. We were chasing a huge pregnant doe. She was about to give birth. We had to be very careful and try to make no sounds.

I was following the pregnant doe deeper into the forest step by step. I was hiding behind the bushes and watching the delivery of a baby deer. I felt someone shaking my shoulders desperately when the baby deer was out. I understood that I should take this baby deer and carry it with me,

somewhere far away. It was the purpose of hunting. I did what was expected of me as quickly as I could. I was quite scared of the mother. She could easily kill me. Then I ran. I was running fast without even knowing why and where. Then I heard Kudai Kam's voice again.

"Put it here," he said, pointing at me with the tambourine and a human figure on it. I put the baby deer into the tambourine and felt it fitting in. "Open your eyes!" Kudai Kam ordered. I obeyed, and then he said with satisfaction:

"We did it! We've caught your Tyn-Bura!"

He handed the tambourine to me. I could see and feel life in that tambourine without even touching it. I asked him:

"What does Tyn-Bura mean? I've never heard this word before".

"Tyn-Bura is the doe's life energy. She gave her skin for your tambourine, so now it is your life energy too. If someone steals this tambourine, you will die. This thing is precious, and from now on, you should always keep it close to you".

I reached out for the tambourine, and it felt as if it flew into my hands. It was warm. I could feel it vibrating. I had an immediate feeling of connection with the tambourine, and I knew it was because of the doe's life energy. Then something confusing occurred to me.

"Wait, you're saying it's the old doe's skin, but I put a baby deer into it. Did I do something wrong?" I wondered.

"No, you did just fine. In order to get the Tyn-Bura of the old doe, you had to catch it when she was still a baby. We helped you to go back to the past, to the moment when she was delivered. From now on, this Tyn-Bura will serve only you. It will have no other purpose. Now you understand how to catch Kut, so you will not need anyone's help next time you have to do it.

Everything in this world has a Kut – a soul. When you heal someone who lost their Kut, you must travel to find the ill person's Kut and catch it with this tambourine handle. Then you have to bring the Kut back to the present and let it in the ill person's left ear. This is how you return a stolen Kut.

Your Tyn-Bura will be your best friend and your helper. It will teach you many things. Your next task is to mark your shamanic territory. You should make a map on a deerskin. I will show you how to do it later".

"By the way, Kudai Kam", I asked, "why was the tambourine in Mamush's house broken?"

The shaman paused. Then he said it happens because the world where people go after they die is a mirror reflection of our world. What is good for people in this world can't be good in the other world, and vice versa. If they didn't break Mamush's tambourine when he died, he wouldn't be able to use it in the other world.

I spent the whole day in the mountains with Kudai Kam and his helper. They showed me many things a shaman should know and be able to do. We had

to wait for the night to go back. It was important to guide me back because I was meant to inherit my uncle's magic lands on the way back. Kudai Kam led me through the underworld and showed me loads of different things, all of them extremely important. I learned a lot that night, but I'm not in a position to tell you about it. Now I would like to have some rest".

He sighed and went silent.

Maria was literally speechless after this story. She stood up and went to the sink to wash the tea cups and think over what she had just heard. Saosh's story stirred her to the core and touched her heart. The story consisted of separate episodes, but they were all connected somehow. Her professional attitude didn't let her fully trust her patient and take him completely seriously. But the image of Kudai Kam didn't leave her. It was looming before her eyes, haunting her.

While she was reflecting, trying to analyze the story, it occurred to Saosh that Kudai Kam didn't actually have time to sleep, and he shared this thought with Maria too. Kudai Kam seemed to be moving from one place to another for two days in a row without any breaks. How is that possible? Maria shook her head distrustfully but didn't know what to say. There was no answer to this question. She kept cleaning the kitchen until she heard Saosh saying:

"We need to hurry up. It's almost 7 a.m. The bus will be here in fifteen minutes. It will take us home – to the place where I was born".

"What? A bus?" she shouted, astonished. "Is there a bus here, really? Why did your family make me walk here through the snow for a few hours then?"

"Because there is one bus every twenty-four hours", explained Saosh. "And now it's the time. See how lucky we are. Please, get ready!"

She was shocked when she saw that bus. It was so old and shattered; it looked like it shouldn't have been working anymore. An immobile metal box somehow brought here to the middle of the road. Saosh insisted: "Don't be surprised, Maria! This is a real bus, and it is even able to transport you to my village, to the place where I was born! I will see my relatives if we get on it!"

And so they did. Maria suddenly felt sad about moving further from Kudai Kam.

"Saosh!" but she couldn't say. "What about Kudai Kam? Will we ever see him again? Did he leave any message?"

Before he had time to reply, the bus groaned and moved along the tiny village street in the direction of the forest.

"I have no idea where he is. Didn't he tell you anything?" She didn't answer, and he felt curious.

"Maria, what were you expecting?" "Nothing", she said, feeling disappointed.

Saosh Yant suddenly realized how enormous the part the shaman played in his life.

"I owe him something," Maria said. "I want to pay him for healing you. Can you please give him this money from me, Saosh?"

"No! No way!" the young man waved it. "He will never accept money. Plus, if he needed money, he would have told you".

The bus swayed on a road bump, and they tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible. The road could hardly be seen, so going by the cold bus, bouncing every other second, was not much faster than walking through the snow. They hardly spoke, and Saosh was thinking about Kudai Kam and the life-altering meaning of this encounter.

He tried his best to understand and accept everything he had experienced. Still, it was too complicated to embrace all at once. Kudai Kam didn't explain anything to him. More than that, he didn't express any interest in him. He didn't seem to care if Saosh and Maria were going to stay or leave. Everything felt incomplete and made him question the importance of what had happened. He was still wondering: "What if this astonishing experience, which seemed so important to me, was just an ordinary case for Kudai Kam? What if I am one of the hundreds of other people he is not interested in at all? If it's true, why does it still feel so important?"

How Did Shamanism Come into Being?

"Remember now?" Kudai Kam smirked.

"Oh yes, I do", Saosh nodded, laughing at himself too. "Tell me, is it something that happens to everyone? I mean, are all future Kams start from "losing their mind", acting weird and scaring people?"

"What else did you expect? Everyone who is supposed to take this path has to go through a shamanic illness".

"Isn't it possible to become a Kam without this illness?"

No, son. It's not that easy. Spirit point out a certain person and this person starts to "act weird". Nothing is given to us "for free".

"Why exactly is this person acting weird?"

"Because they connect to the unknown world, the world of spirits. It's extremely difficult for a newbie to find their way in it. That's why it's impossible to be "normal" from the start".

"Is that world big? What do you know about it, Kudai Kam?"

"It's enormous. It's a huge world with a countless number of spirits. Only a few of them help shamans. All the others are not for us".

"Do shamans know about them?"

"Normally, yes, but they don't contact them. Shamans just don't need these

spirits. For example, you live on planet Earth, but you don't use all of its resources, do you?"

"Well, it's simply impossible", Saosh smiled.

"Here, it works in exactly the same way. Shamans use only the spirits they really need".

"Tell me, how did shamanism actually appear? Where did it come from?" his eyes sparkled with curiosity.

"I'll tell you. It was a very long time ago, at the dawn of humanity. When people died, they went to a better world where there was no poverty, misfortunes and miseries, wars, destruction, betrayal and thefts. Apart from the most frightful sinners, of course. People were given second sight, and they knew about faraway things, about the past and the future. They gained many other abilities and skills; they had never had so much power in the material world, limited by their physical body. In the new world, where the souls found their new homes, they had everything: new knowledge, skills and opportunities. Every shade of positive state of mind, which people usually call "bliss", was available to them. Using ordinary language, those people went to "paradise", from where they could see how miserable were those still alive. They could watch their relatives live their restricted, ignorant lives full of diseases and miseries. They were constantly attacked by evil spirits and experienced a whole range of negative emotions, from fear, offence and jealousy to self-pity and revenge. They could see their families living in hell. So the deceased wanted to help their relatives, to give some advice to make their life easier or save them from trouble. They were trying hard to send them a message to warn them, but none of them could see or hear them! The deceased ones could spend days and days next to the living people, but they wouldn't sense them at all. They would shout into their ears that something horrible was going to happen, but it was all in vain! Living people didn't pay attention to anything. They moved on straight to the disaster. They made serious irreparable mistakes. Fires burnt yurts, sometimes the whole villages. Cattle died from illnesses. People got injured. Predators attacked cattle. Children fell ill. Numerous misfortunes! It's like, the creator knows everything in advance, all the answers, and wants to help the one who has to solve the task, but they're unable to see or hear him; they are deaf and blind!"

"Ignoring him?"

"Kind of. It lasted for a long time. Finally, the deceased ones realized that it would never be possible to communicate with people living this way. They called a meeting thought about it and discussed the problem with great spirits and Gods. They consulted Ayami from many areas. Finally, they decided to send the wisest old man, called Kam, to Tengri Han. It was a very hard journey. Tengri Han is the God of Eternity, and you know that. The Eternity is where there is no past or future; there is only infinity,

eternal knowledge, wisdom and greatness. Once you reach Tengri-Han's land, you can lose yourself forever and never to return.

They wished him a good trip. "Fly, brother Kam, fly! When you see empty, spacious fields flooded with bright light, you will know you're about to reach your destination. When you see His yurt, decorated with thousands of eyes, you will know you're there. Make a bow and ask your heart if you are allowed to come in, and then do what the Master tells you".

And the elder Kam flew to faraway unknown lands. He was enjoying the beauty of that world on his way. He had a chance to see a lot. He couldn't stop watching everything around him. He was amazed by the perfection of God's creations. The colours were so deep and bright – he had never seen anything like that before. He could see new children appearing as God's concepts. He could see new things, people and events growing ripe in their heaven nests under the watchful eyes of beast mothers. He saw it all descending on the planet Earth. He saw plenty of future things, events and people still waiting for their moment of incarnation.

Then the beautiful landscapes disappeared. Everything melted in a light blue mist. He entered the deserted land, flooded with dazzling white and golden light. He stepped on it and didn't know what to do next. The light made him scared. He was afraid of losing himself. He covered his eyes with his hand and prayed inside: "Great Master, Tengri Han, please, don't be angry with me. Please listen to my request! I am not asking for myself. I am asking for people living on Earth! They are wearing themselves out, exhausted by their ignorance! Please, show some clemency on them, Master! Please hear my prayer!"

The space around him quaked. A low, loud resonant sound pierced the air like a huge heaven tambourine. Kam shuddered at the greatness of the sound.

"Open your eyes", he heard the solemn low voice of Master Tengri Han. And so he did, seeing a golden yurt strewn with thousands of eyes, dazzling white and shimmering. Each eye was looking at him and, at the same time – into the Eternity.

"What a miracle!" said Kam. "Where is the master himself?"

The canopy of the yurt immediately went up, inviting him to come in. Kam was not easily scared, but sneaked into the shelter extremely carefully. Unbelievable! The Master Tengri Han himself sat solemnly right in front of him! He was wearing purple; he looked handsome and noble. He had eyes on his hands, feet and between his eyebrows too. The feeling was that he could see through his guests.

"So you are here to ask for other people?" he pronounced without moving his lips. Somehow Kam understood what he was saying. It was some sixth sense, opened.

"Yes, Tengri Han. People destroy themselves without knowledge, light and

truth. They ruin themselves for nothing. They fall ill and get injured. Life on Earth is very hard...."

"I know, I know. I'm aware of everything. "Then help us! Please! It's nothing for you!"

"It's nothing for me?" Tengri Han laughed, and the sound echoed in the huge space. "Yes, it's nothing for me. But people..!"

"What about them?"

"They are too far from where I am. My world is not available to them. Besides, they are indifferent to my world. They are so remote from Me, you can't imagine. They are as far as the most distant stars in the Universe from Earth. People are not interested in My life. They show no interest at all.

"But I don't ask much. I ask to give them a small opportunity to learn something. You know, exactly as much as needed to make their lives on Earth better. I just want them to suffer less".

"I see. But there is one more problem". "What is it?"

"People are lower creatures. They can take advantage of the knowledge but use it for evil purposes".

"Then choose the best of them! You know and see everything!"

"Ok. Then I will let spirits choose. I am too busy doing other things. Listen carefully and remember. First of all, you will need to choose a living person to contact you and listen to your advice. Understand?"

"Yes, Master," Kam answered respectfully.

"Good. This person should be able to fight evil spirits, asking you, good spirits and spirits of the deceased ones, to help. You will choose the most talented people; I mean the most sensitive and empathic ones. You need the most sensitive and most powerful from their tribe. They should have a very strong, energetic personality. You know what strength of mind means. I don't have to explain it to you. Right?"

"Yes! It's easy, nodded Kam.

"Then you are going to take his souls out. Sur Soul, first of all. You are going to show this world to his Sur Soul. You will introduce him to your kingdom. Your chosen one will start to see another world and talk to spirits. In the material world, he will look like he is going crazy. But it's not the case. He will have a shamanic illness. Later, when he gets used to his new skills and state of mind, he will be able to see you, the deceased ones, in his dreams. You will also teach him how to do everything: a tambourine, a kyamla, shamanic clothes, pendants and other shamanic attributes, which will help them reach the spiritual world, be able to see, hear and communicate with spirits, getting them to help people. You will teach shamans how to perform rituals, make sacrifices and many other things. So people will have shamans in their material world".

"Is this all I need to know?" Kam was about to cry from happiness.

"This is all for now. Do what I said. You will learn the rest while teaching

them", Tengri Han said, and his voice sounded like thunder.

"Tell me, please...."

"What else do you want?"

"Why will these people, the mediators, be called shamans?"

"You will learn about it later. Now GO!!! Your time has run out. If you don't want to stay here forever and lose yourself... YOURSELF... YOURSELF..."

The booming echo caught up with the Master's last words. The yurt got lightened with white and golden dazzling shine. Everything flickered in a sudden flash and disappeared. Tengri Han and his heaven home were no longer there. Everything vanished, and the space became empty and tranquil.

At the same moment, Kam felt an overwhelming desire to go back home. He flew back to his fellows at full speed. Here he is again, at the border of pure stillness. Behind it, there is a subtle world, the most beautiful and perfect in the whole Universe.

He told his friends about Tengri Han's instructions, and they started. They began by taking out living people's souls into the subtle world. They started to show them everything and teach them. Good spirits were guiding future shamans. They were also taking care of his family, inspiring them with the right thoughts. They were making sure they would not treat the shaman as a crazy person. Those were hard times, you know it. If someone was mad, people could be relentless. This was how the first shaman on Earth appeared. Then there came more and more, the whole generations, inheriting the skills from each other. The shamanic gift, Tyn-Bura, is passing from one person to another".

"So tell me, Kudai Kam, why are shamans called shamans?" the curious young man couldn't help it.

"Haven't you guessed?" "No".

"It's simple. The first man chosen by spirits was called Sham. That's it!" the old man laughed contagiously and loudly.

"Ah! I get it, the guy waved his hands. "Why couldn't I guess? Then he died and went to heaven and became an ancestor spirit. He started to help people on Earth. So the name of the first ancestor spirit who helped people was Kam, and the first shaman's name was Sham! As simple as it gets!"

"Yes. The great shamans have been called Kams since then.

"And normal shamans are just shamans".

"Yes. Of course, many things have changed since then, and people have got everything mixed up. But the idea of shamanism stays the same. The more complicated the situation on Earth was, the more help people got from the deceased ones and the friendly spirits. The more people asked for help and received it, the stronger shamans became.

Guided by spirits

So shamans got stronger and stronger with every generation. If the whole village attended the ritual of the shamanic journey, spirits were happy and blessed the shaman in a special way. People went to the shaman's yurt to watch the ritual because they knew it was the best way to get the help they needed. Besides, it was a very impressive performance. Shamans described everything they were doing and seeing or whom they were meeting. They were speaking for spirits. They were telling people what spirits helped them. People were listening to them and got involved, too, giving their empathy to the shaman. Their energy supported shamans, and spirits liked it a lot.

"Is it similar to how we feel empathy for characters in the films or books or theatre plays?"

"Yes, very similar. Participating in the ritual was extremely important. It was the perfect way to get help, meet other people from the tribe and even have fun. It was also a way to educate young people. People's belief in spirits was infinite".

"Yeah... Not like these days". Saosh Yant waved his hand.

"Modern people don't even go to cinemas so often. They prefer to stay at home and watch TV or, even worse, stare at their computer screens. Everyone is so distant from each other!" "It's true. People have become spiritless. They live too easily. They don't believe in Gods and spirits anymore. Technical progress has become a substitute for everything. They don't even want to move too much. In old times everyone worked physically. People were doing things all the time. People used to walk long distances, ride horses, plough, sow, mow and hunt. Everything required physical effort. Now everything's different.

"Yes, that's true!" it dawned upon Saosh.

"Cars, metro, trains, planes and all other kinds of transport, lifts, escalators, all these things let us live without any physical efforts. There's no need to cut wood. Central heating or just home heaters will warm us. There's no need to carry water. The water supply system does it perfectly. No need to go hunting or fishing, no need to plant vegetables or plough the fields... Why would we do that when there's so much food in the shops? You can buy anything you want. What do people have to do then?" Saosh suddenly felt terrified.

He felt goosebumps all over his skin.

"All you have to do is wait for the end to come" Kudai Kam laughed loudly.

"Medical science is getting stronger, and people are only getting weaker".

"Yes, exactly. I saw a billboard last time I was in the city. There was a beautiful picture on it. A nice landscape, green silver-firs, dazzling snow mountain peaks, bright sunny sky and a mountain lake with clear blue

water. And they use this picture to sell oxygen bottles and ozone treatment. They have a slogan: "Feel the energy of nature!" and blah blah". "Ha-ha, true!" the old man laughed again. "People from big cities will move around in wheelchairs soon". The young man burst out laughing.

"Yes, everyone will move around with oxygen bottles and artificial lung ventilation. They will take some pills or hormones every single hour. Being beautiful and healthy will be out of fashion. Healthy people, able to walk without a wheelchair will become relics of the past. Others will start to fear them and avoid them as if they are dangerously ill. That will be real fun!" Saosh fell down on his back, laughing convulsively with his legs up. The cave was echoing his laughter, and it seemed like it was laughing with him.

"Do you really find it funny?" the old man squinted his eyes and stared somewhere far away. He looked as if he was seeing the future humanity doomed itself to. There was sadness in his eyes.

"What's going on?" Saosh stopped laughing and felt anxious.

"Nothing", the Great Kam smiled and looked at the young man.

"Technical progress offers easy solutions for every single problem. That is why shamans become weaker, and there are fewer and fewer of them on the planet. Nobody needs them. People also did a lot to exterminate them in the 20th century. Not just here – it was happening everywhere. American shamans had to go through a lot of trouble. Just like in the north, near Taimyr, just like in Africa or Australia. The process is everywhere in the world".

"But there are still shamans. They can't kill everyone. How about you, for example? You are okay!"

"Yes, I am. But there are very few shamans like me. A few in the whole world. There used to be thousands of us". Kudai Kam went silent, and this silence overcame the cave.

Saosh could see lots of bright images from his inner look. He knew a lot about the past of shamanism. He knew how shamans in America and Mexico were hunted for. Some of them were literally murdered, and others were driven mad by alcohol. He knew that the Soviet authorities took deer from herdsmen in the far north, took children from their parents and sent them to orphanages. That is how the inheritance of shamanic skills was broken. The new authorities prohibited hunting and fishing, which had always been the main way for people to survive under these severe circumstances. Shamans have been murdered, poisoned, and accused of terrible things everywhere. They were intentionally turned into alcoholics too. Their reputation was purposefully spoilt in the eyes of ordinary people in order to impose the so-called atheistic worldview on them instead.

"Listen, but it's a miracle then that shamanism has survived despite all

these troubles", Saosh's face beamed.

"Yes. If you want to physically destroy something, you should approach it from the inside first. Any phenomenon should be affected at a subtle level, spiritually. But materialists rejected all concepts about the spiritual world and didn't even believe it existed. That is why they didn't succeed in exterminating us completely.

"It's awesome! People all over the world are still interested in shamanism and are getting involved. Its roots of it are still alive. It is impossible to destroy them!"

"Yes. Otherwise, you and I wouldn't have been here".

"Tell me, what was happening to shamans next?"

"Shamans were becoming mediators between the world of people and the spiritual world. But the life of a shaman changed too. He couldn't live for himself anymore. He became a totally different person. He served his tribe and lived only for other people. He was in spirits' power. When his fellow villagers came to him and asked for help, it was time to call for spirits. And then he had to do what spirits told him. From the very beginning of the shamanic illness, the old qualities in him were destroyed, and he became a new person, a chosen one. Later, after he underwent the shamanic ritual of dissection and dedication, he turned into a totally different creature, not even a human anymore".

"Not a human?" Saosh raised his eyebrows.

"Yes. Every part of his body, every single bone, was eaten up by a spirit. That is how a shaman got his power over some specific area, which was under this spirit's control".

"For example?"

"For example, there's a spirit of smallpox or plague or cholera. They ate the shaman's bones, and he gained the energy that let him fight these diseases and control these spirits".

"Will I be able to do it too?" Kudai Kam didn't answer and looked at him with reproach.

"I get it, I get it!" the young man waved his hands. Kudai Kam shook his head and then continued.

"So a shaman had to die, partly, to gain the skills that spirits and deceased ones have, while he was still alive. After the rituals, he could see and know everything. He gained lots of abilities, everything you can imagine. Shamans were respected and even a bit scared of. People used to ask for their advice all the time. Shamans were very strong, active and healthy. They were lucky in everything they did, like, hunting or fishing. They never got themselves into trouble because spirits always guided them. Shamans were the strongest, wisest and most powerful members of tribes. That is how it used to be, my friend". "Will I ever be like those shamans?" Saosh smiled joyfully.

"Sure. You've got no choice", Kudai Kam smirked.

"That's super cool!" he exclaimed.

"Remember though", Kudai Kam said strictly.

"The price is high".

"What do you mean?" the young man shrugged.

"The price is not belonging to yourself anymore. You have been chosen by spirits, so there is no way back. They will do their job, whether you want it or not. I will help you, but you've got no choice".

"Well... It doesn't sound bad to me at all, Saosh said carelessly.

"Good for you!"

Why all spirits are different

The young man looked at the walls of the cave closer and was impressed by how smooth they were. The flaky sandy-yellowish limestone looked as if it was levelled and squared by a crafty architect. Every curve had a smooth, well-rounded shape, everywhere, from the floor to the ceiling. Saosh suddenly realized one thing, which seemed SO obvious to him now. THERE USED TO BE WATER HERE! This is who the crafty architect was! It was more than just some water. It was flowing like a big river here. It suddenly dawned upon him: water is literally everywhere on our planet. There are huge winding rivers underground, invisible to us. "External" above-ground rivers are the planet's arteries, and the underground ones are its veins. The ocean is a huge heart of the planet. It pumps the water and doesn't let it stale or get spoilt and rotten. The surface of the planet is formed by large waves that also run high and low, but it happens very slowly. It takes these waves millions of years to go up and down. These beautiful caves are formed when the ground goes up, and the underground rivers change directions! Who knows, maybe this one is a few million years old. Just imagine this! The young man felt chills down his spine at the thought. What if right here, under the place where he is sitting at the moment, there are also some underground streams and rivers that will become caves one day?

Saosh was silent for some time, astonished by the discovery he made. "What is that, my curious friend?" asked Kudai Kam, looking at the young man piercingly.

"Yes, I was thinking... There used to be water here, right?" "Right. Also, you're right about the veins of the planet". "Ha-ha! I won't ask how you know that".

"I do, I do. But it was not your main question, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I want to ask you a very important one. May I?" asked the apprentice.

"Go on".

"You always say spirits, spirits... Spirits help you. Spirits guide you. But where do they come from, their spirits?"

"You are so curious! You literally want to know everything about everything!" Kudai Kam laughed cheerfully.

"But still?"

"It's ok, I was exactly like you when I was young," said Kudai Kam. "Spirits are created by Gods just like all the other living creatures. They consist of five souls also created by Gods. But they are different from us. That is why their souls are developed in a very special way.

"How?"

"They have a whole hierarchy". "So human!"

"Yes, almost. Some of them are more powerful and developed, they are greater than people. Some are lower than us. They are more like animals or insects".

"That's also very human", the young man laughed.

"Well, sort of. Listen. Each spirit has its own influence area. Each of them serves one of the Gods. Each God has a legion of spirits".

"Tell me more".

"For example, good creative spirits of lands, rivers, lakes, forests and mountains serve Umai. They feed everything alive. They want to keep things safe. They guide travellers if they're lost. They provide food and water, heal and give shelter, and they take care and warm when it's cold. One should be friends with them. They are friends and allies for people and all living creatures on Earth. Evil spirits of diseases, sufferings, misfortunes, losses, poverty and everything that harms people serve Erlik. They should be respected too. You should distance yourself from them but still be nice to them and try to please them otherwise, they will get angry and take something precious from you. That is why we always sacrifice a part of what we get. We give them the best horses and the best things we have". "But why, Kudai Kam? These things could be so useful!"

The old man became very serious and looked at Saosh very strangely, piercingly and penetratingly. His stare had a chilling effect on Saosh. He felt goosebumps all over his back. Suddenly he felt cold sweat on his skin. "Why? Because you don't want them to take your life away. That is why. "Ok, I get it! I won't say a word anymore!" he waved. "What other spirits are there?"

"A lot of spirits. For example, some serve Ulgen. I call them spirits of the future. They are good. They are smart. They create things. They inform people about the future. They inform about innovations too.

"How do you mean?"

"Have you ever noticed how it happens? Someone invents something new, and after some time, everyone starts using it".

"Of course, I have", Saosh laughed. "For example, a submarine. Before

Jules Verne, nobody knew about it. But after his book, people invented it and started to use it”.

“Exactly. Modern people dream about going to Mars. But in three hundred years, it will be as easy as going to another city now. The moon will become a huge shipping terminal”.

“Or a raw material colony?” Saosh Yant laughed. “Very probable”, nodded Kam.

“Why should we wait for so long, though? Three hundred years!”

“Because it takes a long time for things to descend to this level. Even to have a baby, people have to wait for nine months! The bigger the things, the more time is needed. Gods need to prepare everything for its implementation. First comes a wheel, then a cart, then gunpowder. The order should be correct. Every time a person thinks about the future, dreams and makes plans, spirits of Ulgen help them”.

“I see”, Saosh sighed. “Are there any spirits who serve directly God Tengri?”

“Of course! He is the God of all Gods! His spirits are the most sophisticated creatures. They exist on the subtlest level and feel the slightest vibrations of everything”.

“What spirits are they?”

“Angels, archangels, cherubs, seraphim's. Guardian angels too. “How can ordinary people get in touch with them?”

“It doesn't happen so often, but if it does, you will realize it and never forget. When we are in trouble, when we have to make a difficult choice, angels whisper in our ears where to go and what to do to get the right result.

“Is it like when a person is late for a plane that is supposed to crash?”

“Sort of. But it's not about it”. “Then what is it about?”

“When it happens, this person feels really grateful. People start to think more about Gods and Eternity, and they thank them. People start to realize the meaning of their life on Earth. This is the main lesson. This is the main purpose of Tengri God”.

“I've heard many times about people who survived a clinical death. They perceive life differently after this experience”.

“Exactly. Because when they were “temporarily dead” they were contacting spirits directly. So they start to understand much more. After this kind of experience they change their lives because they can't stay the same”. “Does everyone have their own Gods? I mean, do some people listen to some Gods more than others? For example, when I was in school, there was a boy who always used to watch films about vampires and dreamed about digging graves. Another one became a priest and later even became a monk. We were all classmates but so different from each other....”

“Yes. All our preferences, tastes, habits and even our personal qualities

depend on the God we serve. It determines our personal “settings”, our goals and interests. It all depends on what spirits we communicate with and, therefore, forms our destiny. This is for you to consider: what is your path, my friend? Where should you go to?”

Life of spirits

“Tell me, Kudai Kam, what will happen when we die?” “Another life”, the old man smiled.

“What kind of life?”

“You know, all living creatures become spirits after they die. At the same time, spirits can turn into living creatures, like plants, insects, animals and people. When a living creature becomes a spirit, it becomes more intelligent even though it was just an insect in its life on Earth. It happens because any physical body blocks many spiritual qualities and abilities. When a body no longer exists, every creature starts to see both past and future clearly. They become able to see and hear regardless of distances. They become able to know other people’s thoughts and communicate with any other spirit non-verbally. People who speak different languages can understand each other without words. Germans can understand Chinese people, Egyptians know what Americans talk about, Brazilians can talk to Indians, and so on, because thoughts are transmitted in one language, which is the same for all living creatures on the planet. No language knowledge is needed.

“Awesome!” Saosh got overexcited. “People waste so much time and energy to learn another language!”

“Besides, spirits of insects, animals and plants can easily talk to each other and people”.

“Like in fairy tales?” Saosh laughed. “Animals can speak like humans?”

“Yes”, nodded Kudai Kam. “Everyone understands each other and becomes more intelligent, more humane because the physical body blocks skills and intelligence. When a living creature finally gets rid of the mortal sheath, it gains a lot of power and abilities”.

“How do shamans get these skills then?” asked Saosh.

“Spirits take shamans out of their bodies and learn how to live as a spirit in Sur’s body or other souls’ bodies”.

“How long do spirits usually live?” Saosh was curious as usual.

“A spirit’s life is 7-9 times longer than any living creature. For example, a cat lives 12-15 years”.

“If it’s a pet and lives at home, yes, even more”.

“Yes, I’m talking average. When a cat dies and becomes a spirit, it lives ninety years more in the dreamland”.

"What about humans?"

"The same. A human lives 70-85 years on average. "It depends on the country."

"Yes, but we don't talk about the most underdeveloped ones. If a person lives healthily, has good genes and peace of mind, it is possible to live even 120 years nicely. Then his spirit can live even for 900 years".

"What spirits do people become?"

"It depends on how they lived and thought in the material world". "I see", Saosh Yant scratched his head. "How about other spirits?"

"Spirits of rivers, lakes and mountains live for many thousands of years. For example, when a spirit of a mountain dies, its souls fly back to the Gods who had created them. Bosy goes to Ulgen, Tesy belongs to Erlik, and so on. And later another spirit takes its place".

"Does it mean a mountain can die? How's that?"

"For example, if a mountain becomes ruined after centuries under the sun, wind and rain. It takes a long time but there might finally be a highland, flatland, or even a desert. In this case, a new spirit will come, a spirit of highland or desert".

"So interesting!" Saosh said. "Can spirits reproduce?" "Yes, but not all of them".

"Which ones can?"

"Spirits who do not incarnate on Earth can".

"How does it happen?" Saosh asked a trace of irony flashed in his eyes.

"Easy, by budding. A small part separates from a spirit, and then all five souls – Ayy, Tesy, Bosy, Sur and Kut – inspire it and form a new spirit. This new spirit grows, gets stronger and finally becomes the same spirit as its ancestor".

"What spirits can do that?"

"Many of them. For example, spirits of nature can. Leshys can reproduce like that; water spirits also can".

"Where do they live?"

"They choose certain places they like. They pick the best places. A Leshy can live on a huge powerful tree with lots of branches. Very often, this tree stands alone somewhere in a meadow. A mountain spirit can live in a beautiful rock, unique in its shape. A water spirit would live in the deepest place of a river or its most beautiful curve".

"Fair enough!" Saosh giggled. "Good choice!"

"Sure", Kudai Kam winked at him. "I bet you would also have chosen something better if you could".

"Of course! I'm not stupid either!" Both laughed.

"Shamans respect these places," continued the old man. "They respect spirits who live there. They never make noise in their homes and speak in a calm and quiet voice. They never spoil the place and never leave any

traces of their visit; I'm not even mentioning garbage – it's out of the question. They come there only when there is an exceptional need, otherwise, the spirits might get angry and send a curse".

"Do spirits spend all their time in a tree or in a rock?" asked Saosh. "It must be terribly boring".

"No, they don't. Only people should always exist physically. Spirits can easily leave their shelter and travel whenever and wherever they want. They can fly around the whole Universe because they have no bounds of a physical body".

"Why do they always come back to the same place then?" "They feel a connection with their homes wherever they are."

"I see! I'd like to become a spirit too!" announced Saosh cheerfully and started running around the cave, flapping his arms like wings".

"Well, you'll have time", Kam sneered condescendingly. "Come on, that's enough. Sit down!"

Ayamis. Host and hostesses of Nature

"Do spirits have their hierarchy" Saosh sat down again and asked.

"Sure. Spirits are classified according to their power. There is a spirit of Altai who is responsible for the whole area. He is great and beautiful and powerful as our father Altai itself. Smaller spirits, like mountains, rivers, lakes and forest spirits are his subjects. Then there are lower spirits – spirits of creeks, meadows and villages. Each spirit has its area of influence". "Like in the army?" asked Saosh. "There's a commander of a division, aregiment, a troop?"

"Yes, very human-like", said Kudai Kam. "Just like a general cannot command every soldier directly, the Supreme spirit of Altai manages only the highest spirits".

"You know what? I think I kind of understood it when I was a child. My grandpa always took me out with him for short travels. As soon as we climbed a mountain or crossed a river, everything changed as we entered a different world. Everything changed! Trees, plants, the entire atmosphere! As if we were in a different country with another ruler!

Once, we were hiking in the Altai Mountains for a few days. First of all, we went to the plateau Ukok to greet the princess of Altai, the keeper. It was freezing! We had to warm each other at night, covering ourselves with everything we had! We were lying on a fur skin and dry leaves under it, and all the rest, including our sleeping bags and all our clothes, were like a huge thick blanket on us. When we woke up in the morning and got out of the tent, all the flowers, grass, stones, lichens, and bushes shone with frost! Little crystals of frost were shimmering in the first rays of the rising sun. It looked like a miracle! I breathed out and saw steam coming out of my

mouth. My nose and ears were red from the cold. I felt fresh and light. I didn't expect it at all – it was still summer, the middle of August! Too early for the first snow, which usually falls in the middle of autumn! I had a feeling that the place was “owned” by a very strict, serious spirit. It was tough but fair. It was like the Altai princess. A tall, beautiful woman, strict and strong-willed. She was far from being weak or sentimental. She looked magnificent – a true royal family member. She had two elegant plaits around her head, roses on her cheeks and sharp sight. She kept an eye on her guests, strictly observing their thoughts and intentions. She keeps evil people away from her place or punishes them if they show disrespect. Nothing is easy then to get lost in those lands. There's still no mobile signal, even now. It's a TRANQUILITY ZONE...”

The shaman agreed. Saosh could see he understood him deeply. He continued.

“So we greeted the Altai princess (she was “at home”), made sacrifices and went on. A few days later, we reached lake Teletskoye. We moved on to Ulagan, passed by the Red Gates, and went down to the river Chulyshman across the Katu-Yaryk pass. Then we followed the watercourse and reached a stunningly beautiful place. Unlike the plateau Ukok, it was warm and mild there. There was a humid breeze from the shallow part of the lake where the water was warmed through. It felt like the subtropics, and only palm trees were missing. The lake smelt like the summer heat and something else, deliciously fragrant, a summer river perfume. There were peaches on the trees! It was like heaven on earth! I could feel there was a different spirit there. I could even feel that spirit was a woman. She was kind, soft, gentle; caring, cheerful, and friendly. She was hospitable too. It seemed to me that I could hear her ringing laughter, her gentle and melodious voice. I could see her beautiful moon-like face with silky skin. She was giving travellers rest, calmness and recovery. We could finally warm ourselves after two freezing nights on the plateau. We were eating peaches.

I was small, and I liked it there a lot. I didn't even want to leave! Locals gave us more peaches to take away. It was very nice there in those days. Locals didn't let any strangers buy the land. They didn't want any changes. But then, in the wild 90s, bad people found that place. They shot everyone who tried to resist their invasion. Now it is like a public place. Anyone can come”.

The Great Shaman's face became strict and concentrated. He was silent. His face looked carved on the rock. The silence felt awkward. Even the air around them seemed hard and tight as if one could slice it with a knife. There was a feeling one had before a thunderstorm.

Saosh was also silent for some time and then said guiltily:

“I'm sorry, Kudai Kam, about touching upon this subject. Initially, I wasn't

even going to tell this”.

“It’s ok. Go on”, the Shaman breathed out, and the atmosphere changed immediately as if some invisible clouds disappeared and the sun came out. Saosh noticed it, surprised at how his patron could affect the atmosphere. “We had some rest and went on”, continued he. “We were going to cross the lake Teletskoye by motor boat. My grandpa arranged it with a local. I was really scared. According to local myths, this is exactly the place where Erlik Han lives. At the bottom of that lake! One should be really careful in those places! My grandpa didn’t make a sound while we were on the water. I was silent too. Everything was cold and depressing. There were unapproachable mountain ridges covered with windfall and brushwood, overgrown with the exuberance of wild plants. We were crossing the lake where so many people had drowned, disappeared in that freezing abyss right thereunder us. Erlik took them all to his kingdom. Rumour has it that divers go down there find the dead bodies swollen but untouched. Thislake is too deep; nothing lives there. There are no fish, no cancers, nothing. Freezing cold water, and it’s sterile. Bodies don’t get rotten. They still stare at you with their glazy petrified eyes. They stare into Eternity. Peoplesay those divers turned grey as snow”.

“I’ve heard about it too,” said the shaman reluctantly. “Is it true?”

“You are too curious”, sneered Kudai Kam gloomily. “Well, but you do know everything!”

“You’d better think about yourself and what you do, not about someone else in the past. This information is too much for you. It will cram your mind.

“Ok, don’t tell me then. So it felt like we were going like that forever. I was silent but kept repeating the prayer to myself, childishly: “Dear God, dear Lordy, please have mercy! We haven’t done anything bad! We will just cross the lake and go!”

There was a moment when I felt that Erlik heard me for sure. Our boat shuddered. Some unknown Force started to drag us down. The local guy opened the motor to its maximum. The boat started to bounce jerkily, sinking a bit and then jumping back. I had chills down my spine. I stopped praying in my mind. I felt it was stupid. I didn’t have any more thoughts. I just felt an overwhelming desire to STEP ON THE GROUND! It took us another twenty minutes to reach the end of the lake, but it was like another infinity. Erlik finally showed us his presence. A long cold face with a split beard and an icy stare chilling one’s heart. He was riding an ox with bloodshot eyes.

Erlik’s skin was pasty, with some shades of green and brown. His eyes could burn you to ashes. His body was covered with thick messy black fur. He had long steel shimmering claws and a very long dark tail behind. He was holding a long lasso in one hand to catch people and an asp-like whip

to urge the ox. Once he flapped that whip, I heard the whistling sound of it right above our heads. I felt completely helpless and terribly frightened. Whatever I did, I felt it would be pointless. I was overwhelmed by despair and inevitability. "I haven't done anything wrong!" was my only thought. I cuddled up to my grandpa, trying not to see Erlik and be out of his sight. And I think I finally succeeded.

I was incredibly happy to step on the ground again. I swore I would never bother the Gods for anything anymore. I would never disturb them, I promised. I'm too stupid. They don't need my prayers. I looked at my grandpa. He was pale as a ghost. He lifted me up and carried me to the horses. I tried to break free and shouted: "I'm already big! Let me go! Put me down. I can walk by myself!" But I think he just didn't understand exactly what he was doing. That night we left for Gorno-Altaysk, back home. These few days made me realize that there is a spirit in every area. You can't confuse them".

The body is a buffer for transferring feelings

"You are right, my friends. There is a spirit in every land. These big spirits rule the smaller ones. The smaller ones rule even smaller ones, and so on. Every little creek, every tiny lawn, a forest or a meadow has its own spirit".

"Yes, I always felt it. When you come out of a forest to a sunny lawn, you immediately feel a different energy flow. And your mood changes too. I used to think: why? But now I know it's because of spirits!"

"When you enter a new spirit's land, they start talking to you through your feelings and emotions".

"Really?"

"Of course. It's the only way they can communicate. They express themselves through something we understand, which is our feelings, emotions, various states of mind".

"Yes! I've noticed these different states of mind! Every time I feel a bit different. In the morning, in the evening, in winter, in summer. One energy can't be confused with another one. One can think that creeks are just creeks, but each is unique! Mountains are only mountains, but still, each has its own character, temperament – a spirit!"

"Now you know how to differentiate them. Good job! You're really learning!"

Saosh felt a bit embarrassed. He changed the subject to interrupt the awkward silence.

"Is it true that our physical body makes us weak and primitive, depriving us of skills?"

"Of course it's true," said Kudai Kam. "When you are ill, you have even fewer skills and even less strength than when you're healthy, right? It's

even hard to think, isn't it?"

"Yes, especially if you have a fever. You're just lying in bed, daydreaming, not so bad", Saosh laughed.

"And you don't care about anything except your disease, right?" "Yes. You feel like an ill body and nothing else".

"See what I mean? And you hurt your brain, you can turn into an idiot".

"Oh no!" the young man laughed again. "God save us all!"

"But it doesn't mean you've really become an idiot".

"You are exactly who you are. But because your brain is damaged, it doesn't let your soul intellect reveal itself".

"Wow!"

"It's even worse for animals and insects because their brain is much smaller than ours. It blocks their soul intellect even more and restricts it a lot". "Do spirits have a gender?"

"It depends".

"Tell me about it, please, Kudai Kam!"

"I see this topic is the most interesting for you," the old man giggled. "Not at all", the young man said shyly. "I just want to learn about spirits".

"Alright, alright", the shaman stroke his hair. "Very often, spirits are both male or female. Sometimes they have only one gender, especially those who had one in their physical incarnation. Actually, people and animals have two genders at the same time, they are bisexual by nature, but our body and our brain let only one side reveal. The other side remains unrevealed during our physical life. But in the next life, this person can have a different gender".

"Whaaaat? GOD SAVE ME!" Saosh shouted so loud that it seemed the walls of the cave shook. "Sorry!" he looked around, asking the cave and the whole place for forgiveness. "I won't do it again".

"Moreover, some people have to undergo this switch in their physical life".

"I don't understand those people. Why do they do it? You were born either as a man or a woman. That's how God created you. Why would you go against his will?"

"It's their way to contact the opposite side of themselves". "I don't get it..." Saosh froze. His lips opened a bit.

"It is very important for a person to get in contact with the unrevealed part of their personality".

"I still don't get it".

"Everyone has the opposite side. If you were born a man, it means you have a potential for being a woman hidden in you, and vice versa. This opposite half is like a perfect image of a person of the opposite sex to you".

"Like, what kind of woman would I love?"

"Yes. If a person reveals this part of him- or herself and gets in contact with it, then their strength will grow".

"Does it affect their real life? Won't such a man become a bit too feminine and capricious?"

"No, he won't. He will only reach integrity and unity inside himself. He will also become luckier. He will succeed in everything. He will not make a mistake choosing a wife because now he knows what is perfect for him. Otherwise, they won't have a happy life".

"Yeah..." Saosh smirked. "I knew one woman. She regretted that she was married to the wrong man. She was always nagging at him, trying to make him better. But he started to drink. Then she started to try and make him stop drinking. As a result, he finally died from alcoholism. And it's not the end of the story. Her three daughters are all married now. Two husbands are alcoholics too, and the third one suffers from schizophrenia".

"It's not only one woman. Many people live like that, sighed Kudai Kam sadly. "Almost everyone makes a mistake when choosing a partner. Why do you think it happens?"

"Why?"

"For the same reason. They fail to contact the opposite part of themselves, so they don't know what partner they need. Deep inside, they know it, but they don't realize that this is the truth. Some don't feel anything at all. That is why so many people are lonely or unhappily married".

An Offended Dead Man

Saosh went silent and pondered. He remembered all those numerous unhappy people he had known since he was a child. There were very few families where one could feel peace and kindness. Something was wrong everywhere. Husbands and wives were constantly arguing, or someone was drinking heavily. Fighting was also not a rare case. Everything happened right in front of the children.

"It's so weird to know", he thought, "that all of this could be avoided if people knew the secret. They should only know whom they need and where to look for them. My neighbour's husband died recently, and she says she doesn't know what to do now because he comes back to her in every dream, threatening to kill her... Weird though... How can a deceased person kill anybody? But she is scared as hell. She covered all the mirrors in the house and couldn't wait for the fortieth day to pass. Maybe it will really be easier, who knows? It's not about that. They've been at each other's throats for their whole life, and now he's dead, and both are still not at peace. What kind of life is that?"

"Thinking?" Kudai Kam gave his apprentice that chilling look, sending shivers down his spine.

"You've read everything again!" Saosh slapped his knee, almost angrily.

“Well, come on, ask what you’re thinking,” laughed the old man.

“Ok, I will, since I can’t hide anything from you. Tell me, why does it happen? The man is dead, but his family is still disturbed. They’ve never lived in peace, and they don’t know! This woman, my neighbour, she’s tried everything! She invited a priest, put some garlic at the doorstep and covered the mirrors, but nothing helped! The dead man still bothers her! He drowned, was drunk, and was found two days later by fishermen. They were setting catchers for cancers when they saw him, all swollen, blue, eyes eaten by cancers. Sorry for these details. Fish disfigured hisface. They called the police. The body was taken to the mortuary. His wife was taken there, too, for the recognition. She just whispered: “Mine” and fainted. She recognized him by the scar he had on his belly and the tattoos on his arms. He was buried in a closed coffin so nobody could see that ugliness.

But this is not the end! It reminds me of Pushkin’s poem, “The DrownedMan”:

*People tell a dreadful rumour:
Every year the peasant, say,
Waiting in the worst of
humour For his visitor that
day;
As the rainstorm increases,
Nightfall brings a hurricane –
And the drowned man knocks,
unceasing, By the gates and at
the pane.*

But in this case, it’s every day, not every year. Well, every night. She dreams about him, and he reproaches her for his drinking. She asks him: “Why is it my fault?” He says: “If you weren’t nagging at me, I wouldn’t drink. If I didn’t drink, I wouldn’t die”. That’s it. The stupid woman doesn’t believe it, of course. She is just scared to go to bed. She leaves the lights on and asks someone to stay with her, but then in the middle of the night, the dream still comes back. He stretches his swollen arms out to her, staring at her with blooded eye-pits and moaning mournfully, like from hell: “You killed me, Nadenka, you killed me”. She wakes up terrified, gasping the air like a fish thrown out of the water, and cries all night. What shall we do with her?”

“I have to visit her.”Kudai Kam looked serious.

“I wish I didn’t tell you. I guess you’ve got other things to do”.

“No. If someone tells you something, it means it’s a sign from spirits”.

“What’s going on with her?”

“With her and with him”. “What do you mean?”

“They are still connected. He was very angry with her in this life, but

an offended dead man is much more dangerous, especially if he didn't disconnect from Earth and stays here. He can actually take revenge and do harm to people".

"What kind of harm?"

"Bad luck. People usually feel like there's some kind of black period in their life. Loss after loss, bad luck after bad luck. Things feel totally out of control".

"The Isle of Bad Luck?"

"Kind of. But the reason is only one. The dead one strikes back. They can't calm down, and their time is unlimited. So they feel free to misbehave and get revenge. Besides, they can be vampires and take energy from living people".

"How do they do that?"

"When people are asleep. Why is she scared to fall asleep? Because she knows he can come".

"What will she feel if he starts doing it?"

"She will feel a lack of energy, emptiness, and also she will be haunted by misfortunes. If someone doesn't stop it, she will be deeply depressed and can even kill herself. It's no joke".

"I see. What shall we do?"

"Normally, a shaman should guide him to the dead world, calms his soul down and disconnects from Earth. Then his soul goes wherever it is supposed to".

"Which God will his soul go to?" the young man was curious.

"I don't know. Maybe to Erlik. I haven't seen him yet" ``the shaman's face became strict again.

"I'm sorry to bother you so much, Kudai Kam, but tell me, what should I do not to become this vampire when I die? I'm scared!.. Honestly!"

"You should only work on yourself while you live. You should think about how to do good things, create something and help people instead of thinking they owe you something. Many people have a lot of expectations but forget to look at themselves, right?"

Right. Kudai Kam, so many people, even young people, kill themselves. Why?"

"Because they can't find a reason to live. They think only of themselves. They have everything, so there's nothing to live for. They're too spoilt, that's it".

"So you need to think of others before yourself, and you won't become a vampire?"

"Right!" Kudai Kam slapped his shoulder. "Shamans have no time to be bored. People always ask for help, so we are too busy to think about ourselves".

"What else?"

“Also, you need to understand what God or spirit will reveal themselves through your mind. You have to chase them away if they are evil and serve them if they are good and kind. We have no other choice”.

“Will you teach me?” Saosh’s heart raced.

“Of course! That’s why you’ve been sent here! Spirits have chosen you, so you will have to learn, whether you want it or not!”

“Cool!” Saosh jumped up again and started to run around the cave. Kudai Kam was laughing cheerfully, watching him.

“Well, ok, let’s calm down,” the old man said. “It’s nighttime, and you’re still awake”.

“But I’m not sleepy”, Saosh answered, like a child.

“It just seems to you so. Lie-down and see if you’re sleepy or not”.

“Kudai Kaaaaam, pleeeeeease!” Saosh lost his patience and was about to cry. They were talking about such interesting things and now all of a sudden he is sent to bed! Who would be satisfied with that?!

“Go to bed, you restless! We have to wake up early tomorrow,” Kudai Kam said it so powerfully that the young man almost fell down. He suddenly slackened. His legs became flabby. He made two steps in the direction of the bed and felt like falling into a deep sleep. Saosh lay down with a feeling of relief and slight disappointment. He touched the simple bed – it was only a deer skin – and started to breathe calmly, like a baby, before falling asleep. A few minutes later, he was far, far away.

There was White Silence around him. A huge endless plateau spread in front of him. The white fog was soaring above it like steam from boiling water. There was not a living soul.

“Where am I?” Saosh looked around, trying not to miss anything.

His voice echoed somewhere very close to him. It was reflected from a very short distance.

“Heey! Anybody here?” Unsure, he made two steps. “Please talk to me if you are here!”

The White Silence was solemnly calm. He looked under his feet, and a strange deluding feeling overwhelmed him. He felt an emptiness in the pit of his stomach as if he was looking into the abyss, and it was following him everywhere and tempting him. He felt dizzy from fear. He looked up, trying hard not to think about the abyss. The White Silence was still shining around him. He felt a bit relieved but not totally. As soon as Saosh thought about “someone” he should find not to be there all alone, he immediately felt like drowning in the new wave of overwhelming global loneliness. It was devouring him from the inside. It crawled inside his chest, grasping his ribs and heart with its cold icy paw. It was impossible to run away or hide from it. It was all-embrative, universal, piercing through. He knelt

and clasped his head and said with all his energy, without even realizing whom he was trying to address and why:

“Feel free to test me if you want. Test me as much as you can. I’m not afraid of You! I know what You need from me, and I’m ready for everything. So? Come on! Do it!”

Ecstatically, he was shouting out these phrases into outer space without knowing whom he was talking to. The booming echo made the sound of his voice much louder and gave it back to him. Vibration penetrated him, and he felt as if he was becoming that vibration himself. It was resounding in his body like strong flows and waves. Strangely, he didn’t feel any discomfort. It was even pleasant to feel it.

When the vibration was over, he suddenly laughed.

“I get it! I GET it! You DON’T exist! I DON’T exist either! Our separation is an illusion. There is no separation. Because there is no you or me. Everything is a huge global illusion! It’s just... it’s more interesting to live like this. I know YOU UNDERSTAND IT!”

He stood up. He was filled with total tranquillity, deep understanding and, the most important, the ACCEPTANCE of everything. He was no longer looking for anything or anyone. He KNEW that everything around him doesn’t exist and does exist at the same time inside him. It made him feel so easy, comfortable, calm and free. He laughed again, sincerely and happily. He was free. He knew he should not be scared anymore. There is nothing to be scared of. At that moment, the variety of the entire world flashed around him and inside him. He saw a lot of various creatures, both from the physical and subtle worlds. Everything is connected in a very sophisticated way but at the same time, exists separately. Everything, every object, every phenomenon, animal or human being has a soul, even a few souls. People are very special sort of creatures. Each soul of a human being can choose in its own direction, which can cause a lot of trouble to its owner, including various misfortunes, losses and even diseases. Sometimes all souls live in peace and harmony, and the person is happy. Everything has its guardian angels and plenty of evil angels, and seducers. The way from birth through the entire existence to death was very clear to him.

He could see it all. He didn’t know why but he could suddenly see how many years everyone was given to live. He saw how fragile and illusionary this world is. He saw new souls knocking on the thin transparent wall, separating the worlds of Future and Present. A whole crowd of new things, events and people was looking forward to entering the world of the Present. They were waiting in a “folded”, frozen condition. When it was the right time for them to come, the “wall” burst exactly in that place where the new soul was meant to incarnate, and the “frozen” “thing” miraculously became “animated”: an event would start happening, a baby

would be delivered and start growing and developing into an adult person. Everything was moving, living, developing, growing, getting older, dying. Spirits, animals, objects – everything around him was meant to die in the end.

“What about me?” he asked himself feverishly.

The new state of mind immediately gave him the right answer. He understood that he was inside of everything and, at the same time – outside. He was out of time, space, events and phenomena. This state of mind, this feeling, was so natural, so familiar that he realized he had no more questions. It felt as natural as walking, speaking or breathing. It was so normal, comfortable, and even the most natural condition. Saosh looked around one more time, embracing all the variety of everything, and nodded, completely pleased and satisfied. Then he felt an irresistible Force taking him somewhere far away, deeper and deeper, making him fall into a dark, dark space...

Following the Force

He woke up with the first gentle rays of the sun caressing his face. The sun had already risen. It was going higher and higher, moving steadily to noon, the climax of the day. Everything was illuminated by the bright shine of the summer sun. It was different from what it had been at night. Everything that had seemed dark, scary and gloomy in the morning was tuned for joy and light; everything was singing and radiating. The cave roof also looked bright in the sunlight. All the drawings became clearly visible. They came to life and played out in fresh colours. Hunters were chasing a huge buffalo, all together, with zest, with spears in their hands. Every single one of them had an erection. “Well”, thought the young man. “People don’t change. Give them a wall, and they will draw the “symbol of life and luck”, regardless of its era. It’s the same in every century”. Saosh continued examining the pictures. The next one depicted the buffalo on its knees, spiked by the lucky hunters’ spears. Crimson blood is flowing from his wound. The colours faded a bit with age, but it still looked realistic, even too realistic.

Saosh looked around the cave. The fire from yesterday went out, but the stones covered with fresh grey ashes were still warm. The cave roof turned out to have a hole. Saosh looked at the smooth curvy lines of the ceiling and noticed it right above his head.

“Interesting! What a wise choice of camp place!” he thought. “It’s a natural draft! If it wasn’t here, we would have suffocated here by the morning from smoke and could possibly go straight to Tengri!” Saosh pondered. “Well, only Kudai Kam, most probably. What about me? I don’t even know where... Well, where was I? Ah, yes. The smoke would have filled the cave. But

because of this hole, the air goes up and takes the smoke away, and the fire keeps burning. It's like a natural furnace! The exit is much lower than the fire pit. Cold air can't go up. Even schoolchildren know this physical law. It means that a cave with a fire is a perfect place to spend a night! So warm and cosy! Genius solution! Maybe cavemen were not as stupid as they seem to us now? Even the drawings... Nice free lines... Right proportions... And the colours are still here, still bright. Maybe cavemen were not primitive at all? What if they just had to live like this after some global disaster? Like, after a big flood? What if the entire world was destroyed and those ancient people had to use anything "available" left? What if they just had to survive here? Who knows, who knows...."

Saosh looked up again, examining that place in the ceiling where the walls grew narrow to form a small hole. "I wonder", the thoughts were bouncing in his head. "How far is this tunnel going? These passages, tunnels and corridors are woven into the whole planet. They are everywhere. They are on the mainland, in the mountains, and at the bottom of the ocean. Even if a house seems to be on "terra firma", it's an illusion. The arteries are everywhere. I even think many of them are interconnected. If only I were a bodiless spirit! I could enter of these little doors! I could sneak into every passage! I could study them and swim through them... Why am I not a spirit? Anyway, I will be one day. One day my life will be over, and then... Wait, what am I saying? Ok, anyway, it won't happen soon". Saosh stretched with pleasure and sat on his bed, which was an animal skin and a woollen cover. "It would be really awesome to be a bodiless spirit", he was still thinking. "What a life it would be! I could do whatever I wanted. I could fly wherever I want!"

At that moment, Kudai Kam entered the cave. He went in like a light breeze, flying into an open window.

"Still in bed, you bodiless spirit?" he said cheerfully. The Great Shaman was fresh and full of energy. He was radiating strength and confidence. His body was pure energy itself.

"Oh, sorry. I was just thinking", Saosh blushed shyly. He felt embarrassed that he still couldn't catch up with his mentor because he was strong, young and healthy. He was always a few steps ahead. He was stronger, luckier, energetic, attentive, and enduring. He even gets up earlier than him!

"Let's go to the creek!" Kudai Kam said cheerfully. "Of course!"

"Bring the flask, and we will get some water".

They walked to the creek quickly, friskily, cheerfully. Saosh felt elated. The path was curving between ancient firs and silver firs, spreading their beautiful green crowns. The path was narrow and rocky. Knotty gnarled roots of fir trees stood out here and there. The young man was surprised to find out he didn't have to think about how not to stumble anymore. His feet

“saw” and “knew” exactly where to step.

They ran to the waterside, took their clothes off and started splashing around naked in the cold roiling water. The water was always freezing here, even when it was terribly hot in summer. All the creeks in Altai are like this.

Enjoying the coolness of the water and feasting his eyes on bright sparks scattering around, Saosh caught himself feeling strange as if his body was asking him, even demanding: “Let me go! It’s time! LET ME OUT OF HERE!”

Finally, he leapt out of the water and started to pull the clothes on. It was clinging to his wet body. He was full of joy. The day was going to be hot, so he didn’t even need to dry himself with a towel. Kudai Kam also got out of the water, and Saosh looked at his body curiously. He was slim, fit and energetic. Nobody would have ever guessed his real age. His muscles were sharply defined but not so big; he didn’t have any belly. His legs were slim, and he had a very upright posture. Despite his age, he looked like a thirty-year-old man in full bloom.

“Wow!” Saosh thought. “All my uncles, brothers, and dad have a visible beer belly plus a bunch of diseases and problems, from diabetes to heart attacks. But he has a body of a young man like I do! I’m almost 20, and he looks 30! He looks even fitter and stronger than me! Unbelievable!” “Don’t worry!” Kudai Kam encouraged him cheerfully. “If you follow me, you will look exactly like me when you’re my age”.

“I wish!” Saosh felt both jealous and embarrassed at the same time.

“You wish! Let’s go back, it’s time! Where is your flask?” “A flask? Oh, I completely forgot!”

Saosh filled the flask with water, and they started to walk back. Saosh felt as if he was flying. He didn’t feel tired at all, and he wasn’t out of breath; he felt only joy and excitement. He felt ALIVE next to his master; it would have been impossible to feel any different next to this amazing strong man. He also felt motivated and full of energy. He felt life pulsing in every centimetre of his body!

They came back to the cave, made the fire and put some water to boil. Breaking dry branches off trees for the fire, Saosh started to ask his questions again.

Spirit Hierarchy, or How to Pray to Make Your Wish Come True

“Why are all spirits so different from each other?” Saosh asked thoughtfully, feeding the insatiable flame with branches. “If all spirits have the same five souls, they all should look the same, shouldn’t they?”

“Haha! No, not really”, Kudai Kam laughed, caressing his hair. “First of all, every single soul develops differently in each spirit. In some of them, Kut is prevailing. The others are mostly affected by Tosy or Bosy. That’s why they have different destinations. They are exactly like people. For example, some people are very developed physically. Other people are like magnets for money. Some people are very kind and empathetic. Some people are intelligent and very educated. We all look alike, one head, two eyes, two ears... Everyone has five souls. But look, everyone has their own destiny. Everyone has something that is the most important in their life, and everyone has their own purposes. Haven’t you ever wondered why people’s destinies are so different?”

“Yes, I’ve always wondered about it, Kudai Kam, but couldn’t find an answer. I was thinking a lot but all in vain. Only now have I started to understand something... So it’s all because our souls are developed differently...Now I see”.

The young guy stopped talking and pondered, listening to the branches cracking in the fire.

“It’s the same about spirits. They are also different from each other. Each has their destiny and destination. Their life stories and personalities are different. Some were insects, and some were plants, some were animals – all their fates are different! A human being has different duties and responsibilities. Demons also have their personal traits, and so do good spirits. This is how it works. The world is huge, and nobody is the same. The world is not a hatcher to get the same chicks. Every individual is unique.

“What if I am reborn as an evil spirit?! Burrgrh! What will happen then?”

“Your destiny depends on your behaviour”.

“I will be a good boy, master”, Saosh uttered in a squeaking voice, and both laughed. Then Saosh went on with his questions.

“I’ve been looking at these walls for a long time. There are so many historical drawings here, but I also noticed a shamanic mandala on one of the rocks, exactly as you have on your tambourine. Have you drawn it, Kudai Kam?” The old man nodded.

“Please tell me about it! I don’t understand exactly what it shows!”

The old man pondered for some time, stroking his beard, looking for the answer. Then he sighed and said:

“Listen. If you look at a shamanic mandala vertically, god Tengri will be on top of it. Only the souls of the most developed creatures can get access there. They dream about it all their lives”.

“What a pity!” the young man said, disappointed.

“Don’t be upset. For most people, it is not necessary and can’t be entirely comprehended. Who is Tengri? Why do we need it? People only think about

how to meet their everyday needs, and they simply don't have time for anything else. They won't be upset about not getting there". Both laughed at the joke.

Meeting One of Tengri's Spirits

"I'm gonna show you something," said Kudai Kam mysteriously. "Close your eyes".

"Ready". Saosh closed his eyes tight, like a child, and even covered them with his palms.

"Don't try too hard. Just keep your eyes closed, that's it".

Saosh removed his hands and relaxed his face. He felt the faint light. "I wonder what's next?" a thought flickered through his mind.

A plangent melodic sound of a Jew's harp touched him gently. A thousand chills went down his spine, freezing, making him sweat. Another sound penetrated his mind, under his skin and embraced his body, making its way to his bone marrow. Saosh felt goose bumps on his arms too. The third the sound pierced him through as if touching his spine, and the young guy felt trembling in tune with the sounds.

The shaman started playing a gentle melody. Tender sounds, flowing freely, like spring torrents, flooded the chaadyr and all the space around it. Saosh felt as if he was coming clear of the ground and following the flying sounds. He didn't realize when he felt he was flying in an endless space filled with music. There were blossoming trees, and singing birds around him, among the fields of gold with numerous cows and goats. He saw nurseries for deer where huge herds of beautiful wild animals with thick skin and branchy antlers occupied a big territory, taken care of very well. He saw rivers and lakes full of fish and an endless taiga with many animals. He saw clouds running in the infinity of blue sky. Sometimes they came together and shaded the ground. Sometimes scattered in different directions, blown by the wind; they lived their cloud life, incomprehensible to anyone except the clouds themselves. He also saw the dignified and unapproachable mountain peaks covered with snow. Eternally grey and solemn, they were above everything around them. They arrogantly thought that they are the top of the world and that nothing could ever affect them. But they were mistaken. The world could affect them too, and it affected them a lot. Their life was just much, much slower than the life of other creatures. Every single one of them was meant to be exposed to heat, wind, rain, and other natural phenomena and experience dilapidation, ageing and destruction, just like everything under the sun. Of course, they preferred not to think about it and enjoy their gorgeoussness and power as long as it lasted.

"This is my Altai", Saosh thought proudly. "So great, so beautiful! My Motherland! My kingdom! How unbelievably huge and infinite you are! I love you, my Altai!"

The next moment the sounds of the Jew's harp started to become more frequent. Kudai Kam's strong hands were making them stronger. These sounds carried Saosh further and further, higher and higher above the ground, like a mighty deer. The next thing he knew, he was in a milky-white illuminated space.

"Where am I?" he couldn't help but exclaim. "Where is Kudai Kam? Where is the music? Why am I no longer hearing or seeing anything?"

The silence around him was tangible. He tried to step forward, but an unfathomable Force paralyzed him. He froze. He felt as if he had to wait for something incomprehensible and inexplicable.

"Actually, I can see" he tried to restore the normal flow of perception. "But all I can see is a milky fog. It's not exactly what I would like to see now. It's too unusual... Where am I? What does it all mean?"

A bright white flash interrupted his stray thoughts. He squinted his eyes again, following his instinct, but it didn't help at all because in this reality, it was his inner eyes he saw with. He tried to turn his head and look away, but these material tricks didn't help either. The vision was still there, right in front of him. He felt totally helpless, unable to change anything. He gave up and yielded himself to the mercy of his fate. He kept watching, curious to see what would happen. The flash continued growing until it filled the entire space around him.

"That's enough! Enough!!!" the young man couldn't stand the brightness anymore.

Suddenly he saw a blurry cloud with something strange inside. The cloud started to melt away, and Saosh saw a huge... EYE. Blue like the sky, framed by a veil of dark lashes, beautiful, it was shining like a diamond. It was gazing at him unwinkingly, penetrating the most secret parts of his soul. He felt uneasy. It felt as if the eye was X-raying him. This feeling was swarming inside him like a bunch of snakes. It was like a hungry leech sucking his energy in the pit of his stomach. He could feel it crawling down his spine. He felt weird, indecently naked as if someone undressed him and took off his clothes and skin. Ah, clothes didn't matter anymore. He felt he was seen through. It felt as if this unknown "Someone" took his soul out, put it on his palm, and examined it closely.

"Who are you? What do you want from me?" the young shaman shouted, desperate.

But the eye kept watching him. It neither winked nor looked away. Saosh decided to go around this eye somehow. He wanted to make a step but realized he didn't need legs to move. He discovered he could easily move in this immeasurable glowing space around him. Astonished, he realized

even more clearly that the eye didn't move.

"What the hell is going on? How is it possible that I am moving... or flying, whatever, but the eye is still there? It is chasing me. It is following me wherever I go! Am I cursed?"

He tried again, and again, and again, but all in vain. He squatted and cried like a baby, hopeless. He didn't know what to do, and that piercing feeling of nakedness was killing him, penetrating his whole body. He tried to get rid of it a few more times, but it was no good. He stopped fighting and surrendered to the Gods. At that very moment, he felt absolute calmness and tranquillity. He felt an almost forgotten feeling of pure joy, a feeling from early childhood. The feeling when you know that the world is yours and filled with miracles. When you feel the integrity. When you belong to this world.

He looked at the Eye again. Now he saw it looking at him with love. At first sight, nothing had changed, but he could see so much compassion and encouragement in that look now.

"How nice! How perfect! I get it now! It's so easy..! It's so amazing... Why can't I just feel it all the time..."

He didn't have time to finish his thought. Sounds of the Jew's harp started to reach his hearing as if trying to break through from an ocean bottom.

"Wait, wait. Not right now! Give me a little bit more time!" he started to resist in his mind. "It feels so good here. Not now. A bit later, please!"

But the sound of the Jew's harp started to penetrate his mind clearer and clearer. A strong wave lifted him up like a feather and brought him back to Earth.

In Ulgen's Kingdom

Kudai Kam was right there in front of him again. "How have I come here?"

"You've never left," the old man said cheerfully, watching him.

"I have! I was there! I saw the Eye!" Saosh was shaking like a wet dog.

"It's ok. You will learn how to be here and there at the same time. I am still teaching you.

"What exactly are you teaching me now?"

"Everything a shaman should know and be able to do". Kam kept looking at him closely. "Are you ready to continue?"

"Of course!" Saosh stood up, walked to the water barrel, and dipped his face into it. Then he dried his face with the waist belt hanging from a rock – the natural hook – and walked back to Kudai Kam. "Yes, I'm ready to go on. I'm all ears.

"The next world, where your uncle Mamush has gone, has no shapes. That world also has its levels. There are nine heavens for different levels of

spirits and angels living there. Seraphims are on the highest level, and cherubs are below them. Then come Thrones, Dominations, Forces, Powers, and then – Beginnings. And below them all there angels and archangels. That's what they are called in Christianity, and we call them "light spirits, Tengri's sons". These spirits are God Tengri's subjects. They help live creatures in their spiritual growth and evolution".

"Tell me, who did I see?"

"One of the angels living in that world." "Is it my guardian angel?"

"How do you feel about it?"

Saosh pondered, immersing in his sensations. He closed his eyes and tried to "tune" himself. He felt the afterglow of the vision. It felt detached. Remote. He opened his eyes and said:

"You know what? It was not my Angel. It's someone else's. I wish it were mine, but it isn't".

The old man laughed approvingly.

"You are doing very well! You've really caught the wave!" "It's so interesting! Tell me more!"

Ulgen Khan

"Then there comes Ulgen's sky". "What is it?"

"It's Ulgen Khan's home. The home of the master of the future! When people pray, they ask him to bless them with his mercy and to send them luck in the future. Every fortune-teller clairvoyant, and every mortal who desires to know what their fate has in stock, are looking up at him, hoping for his answer. All outstanding people, who live their dreams and put them into practice in the material world, go to that world when they die. I mean, all fortune-tellers, prophets, science fiction novelists, everyone who prefers the future to present..."

"There are plenty of them", Saosh sneered disdainfully. "Every single unemployed or retired person can post an advertisement in a local newspaper that they can "see the future". But why do they do it? Just because they want to earn some money easily".

"No, I don't mean those people. I mean serious ones, like Nostradamus, baba Vanga and people like them".

"Ah!" Saosh gasped. "I misunderstood you, sorry".

"It's ok", the old man smiled kindly and continued. "Scientists, who make world-altering discoveries, invent new things and formulate the laws of the universe also go there".

"It's so weird", the young guy interrupted him. "Many things invented by great scientists were not accepted in their time. But 300 years later people did implement them finally. What a paradox! For example, Leonardo da

Vinci was not only a great artist, he was also a great inventor, but his creations were appreciated 300 years after his death! Some of them were even “discovered” again! Isn’t it ridiculous?”

“It’s true because a scientist who invents something new lives in the future world. But future ideas cannot reach Earth immediately. That is why sometimes it takes 300 years or longer.

“But the scientist who invents it dies!” Saosh was visibly annoyed. “Nikola Tesla invented wireless electricity more than a hundred years ago! They treated him like dirt! They needed to sell metals, can you believe it? So now what? They are going to use his technology in the 22nd century or later?” “They will one day. When they run out of natural resources they will remember about Tesla’s electricity and other alternative sources of energy”.

“It’s so stupid!” Saosh even clenched his fists and bit his lip, he was so frustrated.

“That’s how it works. That’s how our world is located in relation to the future world”.

“Ok”, Saosh breathed out. “Tell me more, please. What comes next?” “Heavens of evolving forms”.

“Do they also belong to Ulgen’s world?”

“Of course. There a few of them. They have different density: from rudiments of things and events until they half-develop and fully develop on a subtle level. They are located one above another, and the lower it is the more tangible, visible and denser the forms become”.

“Is that where science fiction writers and scientists go to?” “Them too”.

“Who else?”

“Shamans, first of all. They do it consciously. They don’t do it, following their inspiration or a sudden “enlightenment” that drive scientists. They do it systematically and consistently. They know what and how they should do”.

“They’ve literally caught a God by their beards”, Saosh sounded jealous.

“Not a God. a spirit.

“What spirit?”

“There is a spirit Yaik. He is a mediator between Ulgen and the material world. Or, let’s call him a gatekeeper who delivers a shaman’s request to Ulgen”.

“Do you mean one can’t just get in touch with Ulgen?” Saosh was a bit perplexed.

“When you need something from a company’s director, of course, you can go to him or her directly, and say: “Hey, director! I’d like you to do this and that for me. I need something, so do me a favour, go and do it right now!”

“Ha-ha! No, I would not do that”.

“Why?”

“Well”, Saosh scratched his head. “First of all, you should fill some form or whatever, give it to his secretary, and then wait for what the director decides”.

“Exactly. So you will need to wait for Ulgen's decision”.

Saosh looked at the old man, totally confused. He felt like all his illusions were breaking right in front of him. It was not as easy as he had thought.

He couldn't stop feeling frustrated. ``

“Other spirits live there too,” continued the old shaman. “Ulgen's subjects, his sons and daughters, and many other spirits, busy implementing things and events in life. Ulgen has fourteen children; seven daughters and seven sons. Maidere, the bogatyr created by Ulgen, is the most important one. Ulgen made him the ruler of the world and ordered him to manage everything, including people's destinies. Ulgen eased himself away from the mundane everyday life, but still watches the world, keeping an eye on everything”.

“Like a deputy chief?” “Something like that”.

“So interesting!” The curiosity sparked in Saosh's eyes again. “Wait a second”.

“Wait – for what?”

The old man took the Jew's harp out and started to play again. Saosh immersed himself in the mesmerizing sounds and felt carried away into the unknown again...

Maidere

...and very soon found himself in an unfamiliar place again. It was empty and silent. But this emptiness was filled with omnipresent light. It was not a vacuum. It was not something people normally think about as “emptiness.” One could feel all possible forms of life within it. If one could imagine molecules disintegrating into atoms, DNA chains becoming separate parts, and atoms disintegrating into original elements, one could maybe get a bit closer to the understanding of where Saosh was. The space around him was filled with the highest form of life, which could be transformed into literally anything by the power of thought.

“Where am I?” broke from his lips.

The gigantic echo immediately spread the sound of his voice everywhere around. Saosh even closed his ears instinctively, as if protecting himself from this overwhelming vibration. It felt like he was vibrating himself; it felt like he was about to be torn into small pieces and carried far away without a chance to come back and himself again. He realized he couldn't afford another blunder. He needed to be more careful. He pulled himself together. Saosh was both relaxed and focused at the same time. As soon as

he managed to concentrate, he felt as if “someone” sensed it. The next second he saw a whirl of energy in front of him. He managed to “pull” a part of this silent nameless space “off” him and saw a dazzling flash of light. Saosh squinted his eyes and raised his hand, defending from the light again. But then he forced himself to open his eyes again, squinted them and got ready for everything. He bent his arms and his knees, drew himself together and prepared to defeat an attack. He felt so strained in his solar plexus as it was about to explode. He didn’t know what to do, he was just standing like this, at the ready, watching the light flashing in front of him.

The shine started to fade out, and the young man saw a huge Bogatyr, by three heads and shoulders above him. He was holding a wand in his hands and wearing white clothes with ethical ornamental design, flowing down his mighty body. He had ethical golden amulets with gems – the symbols of his power over the world of dreams, the world of the future. His face was calm and solemn. Soft hair was drizzling down his shoulders, his oval eyes looked wise and kind. He had long fingers and straight long nose; his mouth was beautifully shaped. His gaze was penetrating. He seemed peaceful and tranquil.

“What’s the hell!” Saosh suddenly went limp and relaxed his body. “What’s happening? Who are you?”

He looked into the giant’s eyes and felt a welcoming energy. He smiled to the young man. Saosh finally got straightened.

“Who are you?” he repeated.

“I am Maidere”, said he, and his voice sounded like thunder. “Maidere?” Saosh didn’t know what to say, astonished.

“Yes. I’m Ulgen’s son. I am here to watch people. I’m his temporary deputy on earth.

“What about him? What does he do now?”

“He watched everything at a distance. He is invisible but he always makes sure that the world order is not disturbed. Look!”

The next moment Saosh saw an infinite space with weird, unknown things hanging around. Those were some technical inventions, unimaginable devices. He had no idea what they were designed for. He also saw a lot of live creatures. People, animals, birds and insects – but they were so bizarre, he couldn’t even understand what they were meant for. There were lots of ugly creatures too; there were cripples, conjoined twins, animals and fishes of weird shapes.

“Jesus Christ! Stop it! Stop it now!” screamed Saosh. He had a very ambiguous feeling about everything he saw. It was a mixed feeling of excitement, curiosity and disgust. “Where does it all come from? How has it happened to be here?”

“Ha-ha-ha!” Maidere’s laughter was like thunder. “You’d better ask where it all will go”.

"I don't get it..."

"Things you see now do not exist".

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I can see them!" Saosh started to get a bit angry.

"You don't see things themselves, you see only their design". "How is that?"

"They only exist in the world of the future. They are not on Earth yet. Every single one of them is waiting for the right moment to be implemented on Earth".

"Let's implement them right now and have a look", whispered Saosh surreptitiously.

"No! I can't!"

"Why? We will just have a look. We will not touch anything. I'm just curious what life will be like in a hundred years. Will people be replaced by biorobots and other devices? Will they make a human being so perfect there will be no more diseases?"

"I can't give you this information", Maidere pronounced solemnly.

"That's because you don't know yourself", the guy tried to tease him. "You don't know that's why you don't allow me to try. Right?"

"No, it's not".

"Then what's the problem?"

"Everything has its right time. Every single object. "What "right time ``?"

"The time for coming into that world. Before that time nobody can make it be "implemented". Especially "just to have a look".

"Even Ulgen Han himself?" Saosh was still trying to pinch him. "Even him", he said imperturbable.

"Ok, I get it. What about you?" "What do you mean?"

"How's life?"

"Everything's good. I can contemplate whatever comes my way".

"How is that?" "Look!"

Maidere threw his hand in the air. There was a clap of thunder, and then Saosh saw something absolutely fascinating. The things that had been waiting for their time became all different. Some of them became bright and saturated, others got paler, and some were hardly visible.

Maidere threw his hand in the air one more time, the huge World tree appeared out of thin air. It was a fir tree on top of the breathtakingly high mountain. There was a beautiful calm lake under the fir tree; its milky white waters were fresh and cool. The lake was wrapped up in happiness, novelty, and a light of unknown nature. Saosh couldn't take his eyes off it. Transparent fog above the lake made everything misty. The sun was caressing the beautiful landscape with its gentle light, and Saosh could see bright colourful rainbow. Everything was sparkling, shining and singing. Everything was dancing in the dazzling rays of the sun, full of joy. Everything was awakening to the new life. Four rivers flowed out of the lake into four directions – four corners of the earth. Every river was

flowing into its direction, moving from the world of the future to the world of the present. Going with the flow, objects and phenomena were becoming visible and tangible in the material world.

Saosh looked up at the World tree again, enjoying its beauty and power. He was admiring its dark green boughs, shading the infinite space around. The tree was strewn with bird nests. From a distance one could easily take it for a decorated Christmas tree.

"I get it! That's where the tradition of decorating Christmas trees comes from!" it suddenly dawned on him.

"Yes. This tradition originally belongs to shamanism. But there are nests instead of all those balls, icicles and fireworks".

"What does it mean, though?"

"I'll tell you later. First look at this", Madeire put his finger to his lips. Saosh looked at the amazing scene closer.

Every object on the World tree was in its right place. Everything was in the nests placed on the tree's branches from the top to the bottom. The upper nests were very light and see-through. They got darker in the middle and became clearly visible in the lower part of the tree. The brightest objects, ready to be implemented in the material world, were close to the roots, and their nests were huge. Every object was guarded by a beast mother, a sacred animal that takes care of its "child".

Saosh was staring at this picture of the world, perplexed, not knowing what to say. Maidere looked mysterious and kept silent.

Mother Beast

Saosh started to examine the whimsical nests carefully. There was an exotic animal in every single one of them. There was a female elk in one, a bear or a weird roe deer in another one. The roe deer looked really shabby, she was almost hairless as if after a very bad disease, and had eight legs, all from the front part of her body. Her hooves were turned backwards.

"How bizarre!" Saosh couldn't help feeling strange, staring at this variety of weird species.

There were dogs with twelve nipples. There were wolverines, sitting in the nests with a proud air. There were also bulls, male horses, female bears of all colours, brown, black and white; a crow, an eagle. There were animals of all species.

"What's that?" Saosh asked, astonished.

"These are beast mothers of all people of the world," said Maidere. "But why are they so different?"

"Because every nationality has their own concepts, their own picture of the world, and a different location on the planet. That's why they have different legends and different animals too".

"I see..."

"The point is the same though. The beast mother carries, delivers and nurtures all the new events, objects and people, including shamans. When they are ready she lets them go to the revealed material world. But you need to know one more thing", the giant sounded solemn.

"What's that?" Saosh suddenly felt both curious and anxious at the same time.

"Every shaman also has a beast mother. If the beast's mother was a wolf, a crow, a bear or a dog, then the shaman is doomed to be very miserable because these animals can never get full and satisfied, no matter how hard the "host" tries and how much food he brings to them. When they are hungry they can't leave their shaman alone, which makes him suffer from diseases".

"What's the hell!"

"But the beast mother is still needed. She nurtures him before he is actually -physically - born. She ensures that his souls are well developed before the shaman leaves for the material world. The next time, he sees his Beast mother before he dies. She calls him to take him back. If a shaman sees his Beast mother in his dream or when in a trance, it's a sign. It means he will die soon".

"Wow!" exclaimed the young guy. "I'll be a shaman too. So I will also see my Beast mother before I die, won't I? So I will know about my death in advance?"

"Yes", the giant nodded his head. "But you will be very calm about it. You are going to spend half of your life in the dreamland anyway. In other words, in the world of death".

"What?"

"Yes, it's simple. An ordinary human being sleeps for a third of their life. Approximately, of course. But shamans don't even belong to themselves. They spend most of their lives performing the rituals of the shamanic journey, helping people and all that".

"I understand".

"So when your Beast Mother will come to take you, you'll be prepared for that. The transition will not be a surprise to you".

"I get it. An ordinary human being lives without realizing anything, and then - oops! - the death is knocking on the door! His life is over in the blink of an eye! I'm so happy I'll be a shaman! I'll live a totally different life!" Maidere nodded patronizingly and smiled.

"Watch more", he pointed to the World tree.

There were also very weird birds, vaguely resembling falcons, but on very few nests. They had a sharp prominent beak. Their paws were equipped with strong hooked claws. One wouldn't dare to mess with them. The bird had a huge tail, three times bigger than its wingspread. Her predatory stare was

mesmerized by its strength, power and grace.

"What an unusual bird! Who is she?"

"She is a powerful shaman's beast mother".

Saosh automatically stepped closer to her. She looked up and glanced at him attentively. The young guy didn't get the warning and moved towards her again, carelessly.

"Stop. Don't go there", Maidere warned him. But Saosh didn't listen. He was too curious to stop.

He reached the nest. He was too close to her now. The Beast Mother raised herself on her steel legs.

"Haaaaaa", she gave a predatory hiss, opening her long sharp beak that looked as if it was made from metal.

Saosh was a bit frightened but it still seemed to be some kind of fun to him. The boyish curiosity got the best of him, overcoming his fear. The young man approached the nest. He even started to make out what exactly was in the nest when something hit him on his head strongly. Then he saw a dazzling flash of light. He saw the stars and fainted...

He wouldn't guess how long he was unconscious for. When he opened his eyes, Maidere was in front of him. The World tree was much further from them now, at a safe distance.

"Where am I? What was that?" Saosh asked, trying to raise his hand and rubbing his eyes. His head felt ten times heavier.

"She attacked you", the giant was laughing out loud.

"Why? What do you mean, "attacked?" I didn't do anything wrong!" Saosh got angry. "I just wanted to have a look".

"So what? She must protect her child, so she is good at it".

"But I didn't want to harm her!" Saosh clenched his fists angrily. "You see?" Maidere pointed at his hands.

"What? My hands? What about them?"

"How about this?" Maidere pointed at his fists.

"Ah..." Saosh stared at his right hand, then looked at the left one. "Well, I didn't notice... But I really didn't want to harm her, he couldn't calm down.

"It doesn't matter. Beast Mother can see all of you at once. She can see everything you've got. You can't cheat on her. That's why she pecked you. Ha-ha!"

"How dared she?!"

"There, there! It's only for your own good!" Maidere couldn't stop laughing. His laughter sounded like thunder, and he laughed from all his heart. The sky was shaking from that sound.

"Well, that's enough," Saosh muttered nervously.

"Don't forget you should be careful when you are in the subtle world next time," said the giant and laughed again.

Saosh was sitting there for a while, reflecting, trying to recover. He had

terrible headache, which reminded about his carelessness. He tried to organize his thoughts. The understanding of his own stupidity crawled under his skin and concentrated somewhere in the pit of his stomach. It made him feel awkward and uncasy.

"This is my job", the giant whispered to his ear. "To keep everything in perfect order. To keep Ulgen's world in order, do you understand?"

"Yes", Saosh said, surprised, distracted from his suffering. "Tell me, was I also in such nest one day?"

"Of course. You, and all people, and all things that exist in the material world now".

Saosh was completely taken aback. It felt like the tree had neither the beginning nor the end. Its strong, powerful crown disappeared somewhere in the infinite sky. Nobody could say when this tree was born and whether it will die one day. Suddenly Saosh realized that everything that had ever existed in the world was born here. There is no man on earth who could fairly say that he or she *invented* or *discovered* something. Everything has been created and invented by Ulgen. What about people? What do they do? They just lift the curtain of the unknown sometimes, that's it. Saosh couldn't believe it at first. He was standing there, unable to say anything, contemplating the beautiful sacred vision reverently.

Maidere waved his hand for the third time; there was a sound of thunder, and the vision faded out.

"It's time to say goodbye to you too," he said. "Already? So soon?" Saosh was upset.

"There's the right time for everything. There's the right time for our meeting. Go back to your world and remember what you've seen here".

"I will never forget it," the young man said solemnly.

The next moment Maidere knocked his wand against the ground and became so tall that he could reach the sky.

"Ah-ah-ah!" Saosh screamed, terrified.

A few seconds later Maidere disappeared. Dissolved in the dazzling cloud of light. All Saosh could see was the empty shining space again, the vivifying abyss, the beginning of everything. Very soon he heard the familiar sounds of the Jew's harp, melodic and tight, entering the space. The insuperable Force dragged the young guy somewhere, lower and lower. He only had time to turn his head to look around, and the next thing he knew he was on Earth again. Kudai Kam was sitting there in front of him, examining him closely.

"What happened? Where have I been? What's happening? Where's Maidere?" the future shaman bombarded the old man with questions.

The old shaman was smiling, looking at him as if he was a funny animal.

"Am I here again? Am I?! In the cave? Is it the reality or what? Where's that reality I've just seen? Why aren't you saying anything?"

"Calm down first. Don't be so nervous." Kudai Kam was so calm that he seemed lazy. "How are you going to be a Kam if you are so overexcited when nothing actually happened? Go wash yourself.

Saosh stepped to the barrel automatically. "Well, not right here!"

"Where else?" Saosh looked at Kam as if trying to understand which of them went mad.

"You need to wash your whole body. Dip yourself in the water.

"Ah, I see. I'm a bit slow. I've just come back from there". Saosh pointed to the sky. "Shall I go down to the creek?"

"Yes. Plunge yourself into the water. Immerse yourself fully.

"You've just said 'whole body'. What else do you mean by 'immerse' and 'fully'?" Saosh shouted desperately.

"Why does it make you so nervous?" the old man stroke his hair, looking ironic.

"Stop treating me like a child", Saosh twitched. "But you are a child!" Kam was laughing.

"I'm sorry, I just don't understand what you mean".

"You should immerse yourself in the water. It means you should leave all your concepts and ideas about the world on the bank. Leave your eagerness to understand everything there too. Leave all the junk you carry along everywhere. Understand? You should *immerse* yourself in the water!!!"

"Alright then, you should have told me from the start. Now I get it. Shall I go?"

"Don't rush. I'm coming with you. I'll keep an eye on you". "Ok".

They went down the rocky path to the creek. Saosh felt as if he were flying. He ran to the water and took all his clothes off. He looked back at Kudai Kam, inquiringly.

"Take it all off", the shaman encouraged him.

Saosh immediately took everything off and threw himself into the stream. His strong, young, beautiful body vanished under crystal clear flow for a few seconds. When he stepped on the rocks, it was so slippery; he could hardly balance on them, with his arms out sideways. The water was freezing, the current was extremely fast. It was radiating with energy and force. Saosh stood in the water waist-deep for some time, then recollected his spirits and dived into crystal clear flows. He came up to the surface, took a "mouthful" of air spasmodically and divide again. He did it several times, diving and coming up for air again. When he did it for the last time, the water froze his whole body. He could even feel his cheeks cringing convulsively.

"I caaaan't do it anymore!" Saosh ran out to the bank and rushed to his clothes. He got dressed within a few seconds.

"How does it feel?" Kudai Kam was laughing joyfully.

"What an immersion! A real immersion, I should say! So cool!" "Now you understand what I mean, don't you?"

“Yes!” the young guy shouted out happily. “I can fully feel the life itself now! So amazing! So cool! You know what? I’ve just realized right now how amazing a mountain stream is! Just a simple mountain stream! I didn’t understand it before, as if I was sleeping, not actually living! Only now can I see all the beauty with my eyes open! As if for the first time in my life... ah no! That’s not true! I used to see this beauty when I was a child. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME, KUDAI KAM?”

“I’ve just returned your own self to you. We have no time to waste. Let’s go back. You still have to learn something today”.

Saosh flew back like a bird. They came back to the cave, sat down and the shaman continued to teach his young apprentice.

Umai’s Spirits

“Ayami’s heaven is located below, and so are the heaven’s of many other Earth spirits, her subjects. There were great spirits, like the spirit of Siberia, Altai, Sayan, Yakutia, and other magnificent ones, and also there were lots of smaller spirits, living much closer to the earth. For example, household spirits (“domovoy”), who aren’t very attractive at first sight, normally hide in small secret places, like cellars, pantries, storage closets. They feel great there. They usually look as little hairy old men. They live in houses and keep an eye on it, making sure it’s calm and cozy. They can make plaits for girls or make their hair curly.

Banya spirits live in banyas (Russian hot steam rooms). Normally, they have a big belly and baldhead. His bodies are covered with thick fur. They have short hands and hooked clinging fingers with claws. They can heal from many diseases and give people physical and mental health. They can’t stand drunk people. If they see someone misbehave, they can “occasionally” pour some boiling water on them, or make them slip on the wet floor, or even scare them to a heart attack.

Leshys take care of forests. A Leshy looks like a huge withered tree with dry branchy boughs. They look a bit scary. They can both help and punish. Sometimes they can make people lose their way, keeping them in the forest until they change their state of mind, until they sort their thoughts out. For example, if a person leaves garbage in taiga or cuts too many trees, he will be doomed to wander around the same place in circles until he is totally exhausted. Only when he realizes his mistake the forest spirit will have mercy, forgive him and show him the right way out. It’s nice to leave a small present for the spirit in the beginning of your hike. Give them an apple or a cake. Spirits like treats.

Kikimora is a swamp witch. These ladies are not attractive at all. They are forever hungry, very skinny and constantly moaning about something.

They normally wear some moss greenish-brown rags; the skin on their face and neck is hanging in folds. Their nose is very long and hooked. Fingers are wickedly long, with sharp claws. They stink, too. Disgusting damsels! They punish travellers if they're too confident and looking for adventures too much. They also despise lazy hikers; especially those who want to find a shortcut. If such a go-getter is trapped by a kikimora, it's over. She will allure him, tire him out and drink his blood".

"My uncle died like this. He was looking for a shortcut".

"You see! They also like to scare people just for fun. They feed themselves with people's fear. If someone gets terrified, thinking about what can happen at those mosses, a kikimora will be right there straight away! She will be happy to see the hiker scared, she will drink him up and still it won't be enough for her. They are insatiable, that is why they are always starving, you see.

There are also field spirits, living in the fields. A field spirit looks like a tiny old man with black body, like the ground itself. They have beards and moustache made of wheat spikes decorated with herbs and flowers. They protect harvests but they can also make fun of travellers. They can make them lose their way or "guide" them straight to a swamp. A naughty old guy.

There are also water spirits (vodyanoys) and their wives. Female water spirits look like beauties with light transparent skin, bottomless blue eyes and long green hair; that is how men see them. They drown humans. They can even take many people at once. Very peculiar ladies. That is why one should be very careful and observant with water. If you forget about it you'll be punished one day.

There are also "yard" spirits, who protect house yards, and ovinniks, who take care of hay storage buildings. There are even "lickers" who lick dirty dishes if you leave them unwashed overnight".

"Lick dirty dishes?" Saosh laughed.

"Yes. They are constantly hungry too. One should be strict with them. If they eat too much they become spoilt, and you will never get rid of them. They will make you leave more and more food uneaten so that they can have it. Your food will grow musty all the time. There are also spirits of every single tree, rock, stone, stalactites and stalagmites, and many others. The beautiful and flourishing Umai rules this whole legion.

Who is Umai?

Below there's the world of Earth where Umai is a ruler. There's calmness, order and stability. Nothing is wasted. Nothing disappears without a reason. Everything is blooming, everything is living and

enjoying. People are forever young, healthy and full of energy. Things are always safe and integral. This is the world of prosperity and wealth. Wheat, rye and other God's plants are always waving in the breeze here, caressed by freedom and the sun. Trees are heavy with fruits. There is plenty of apples, pears, plums, nuts and everything you can imagine. The earth is always black and fat, full of ripe root plants. Nobody is ever hungry, ill or sad here. Umai's world is the world of exuberance and fertility. It's a paradise one can only dream of. It's the place where every dream comes true".

"Tell me, Kudai Kam", Saosh's voice quivered. "Is Umai the only woman among all those Gods?"

"Yes", the old man nodded. "She is Tengri's wife. Can you see him aiming at her with an arrow from his bow?"

"How cruel!" the young man laughed. "Wait! But that's not exactly an arrow... Hm", Saosh blushed at the thought.

"Go on", the old man waved his hand, glancing at him ironically.

"He is aiming at her with his.... his... well, you know what I mean, right?"

"No, I don't", the old shaman shook his head nonchalantly, as if he really didn't understand at all.

"He is aiming at her... with his... dingaling!" breathed out Saosh. "Hahaha! Nice one!" the old man laughed, amused.

"What? I think it's a good metaphor. If this is a real arrow it actually means he wants to kill her, so he is cruel, isn't he? But he isn't, is he? Why don't you say anything? You described him as calm, wise, detached from everything. I even SAW it myself when I was there".

The old man looked at the young man very attentively but kept silent. "But if it's like I said", the young shaman continued his reflections, "and he is aiming at her with his... you know... his tool, then they will have children, right? Who are they? Ah yes! Of course! They are souls Kut, Sur, Bosy, Tesy and Aiy. Well... Wait, wait, it's a bit strange that their children are like some weird animals. Tesy is actually a fish! Bosy is a swan! Kut is a deer. Sur is neither fish nor flesh... Aiy is. an eye!!! What the hell? Sounds like bullshit, to be honest. " Saosh scratched the back of his head, looking serious. "I give up. I don't understand how it works. I don't understand who they "deliver". Tell me, Kudai Kam! I give up!"

"You are right. He is aiming at her, and they have children together. But the children are Ulgen and Erlik".

"Ah! I get it! Why couldn't I guess myself? But what about souls? Where do they come from?"

"They are given by different Gods. Tengri gives Ayi, Ulgen gives Bosy, Erlik gives Tesy, Umai gives Kut. It depends on the person's family, his roots and history".

"What about Sur?"

“Sur can be given by any of the Gods. Or, rather, from a spirit that belongs to any of the Gods. Only very integral, unambiguous and strong personalities get Sur directly from Gods”.

“Tell me, Kudai Kam, is she beautiful?”

“Who?” the shaman pretended he didn’t understand. “Well, she...” the young man blushed.

“I don’t know who you’re talking about”. “Umai, of course!”

“Why are you asking?” the old man squinted his eyes, ironically.

“I’m just... well... it’s interesting...” the young man was embarrassed, struggling to find the right word. Then he breathed in and shot out: “I’m just curious – that’s it!”

“Haha!” the old man winked at him, amused. “You saw her once, have you forgotten?”

“No, I haven’t. But I didn’t really have time to look at her closely”. “Go and have a look then!”

Kudai Kam started to play the Jew’s harp again. The mesmerizing melodic sounds filled the space of the cave again. The echoing chorus of various voices filled the young man’s hearing, crawled under his skin, touched his heart, and... He flew away again, carried away to the unknown, exciting and beautiful world. The world of mysteries, the world of the scaring unknown, and amazing discoveries.

Beautiful Umai

The flight ended as abruptly as it had started. The young man saw a light silver shine in front of him. The shine looked like a ball of light, and its borders were blurred and blended with the space around it. The whole space was filled with silver light, too, and it was just a bit duller.

The light started to grow, getting brighter and brighter. Then a flash of light dazzled him suddenly! Saosh closed his eyes tight and covered his face with his hand. When he opened them again, he saw a beautiful young woman. She looked as if she was weaved from this silvery light.

A true female beauty and power inspired her beautiful moonshine face. “This woman can bring into this world a dozen strong, healthy babies, I guess”, Saosh thought. “It would be perfect to have such a wife!” he caught himself thinking but took himself up shortly. She read his thoughts and gave him a barely visible arrogant smile.

“Oh my god, what am I thinking?” the young man felt embarrassed. “What a shame! She KNOWS all my thoughts!” He continued contemplating the beautiful image. She looked twenty-five... maximum thirty years old; in the prime of life. She had roses on her beautiful cheeks; gently shaped eyes on her round face looked friendly and welcoming. And her hair... It was silver,

flowing and tender. It flowed down her shoulders, lightning her stunningly beautiful face. Saosh looked at it closer and gasped, astonished. The hair was alive! An ethereal light was flowing through it. It was beautiful but cold. "What is it?" he thought. "It's... it's moonshine! Well, it can't be..!" Saosh examined it even closer. He made a step towards her but she moved further away from him. He looked again and saw it clearly. Umai's hair was made from moonshine! Or, rather, the moonshine was her hair. Saosh was very surprised to discover this.

Umai was holding a full cup in one hand, and a branch of a fir tree in the other. Those were symbols of fertility, health and power. Her loyal companion, the Deer, was next to her, representing the Force of Family, the Kut soul.

She made a wide gesture and said:

"Look! This is all my kingdom!"

He saw fields of ripe wheat and rye, oats and buckwheat, fruit trees, heavy with apples, pears, cherries, plums and whatnot. The trees looked so tempting in their abundance! He could see the internal parts of the Earth, full of precious metals and other natural resources; he saw forests full of animals and birds, rivers full of fish. He could see seas with various creatures in their deep waters. The abundance of the whole world, its health, fertility and prosperity was concentrated here, in these gentle hands of this beautiful gracious woman. Saosh froze, overexcited.

"Stay with me!" the woman looked at him invitingly. "You'll be forever young, healthy and handsome! You will have everything you can imagine! I will give you everything – wealth, comfort, cosiness. You'll be the richest man on earth. All the precious things of the world will belong to you. I will give you caress and tenderness. None of the ordinary women can be compared to me. Only with me, you will know what a true passion is. You'll be happy!" Umai moved closer to him and stretched out her beautiful arms. He looked down, unable to look away, and saw her tight, springy breasts. They were big, high-set, gentle and tempting. The young man felt he was losing control. She was too mesmerizing. He could hardly resist the desire to hug her, start caressing her and lose himself in her forever. He felt blood pulsing in his temples. He didn't realize what he was doing. He even stepped towards her but suddenly something helped him to stop. Mind over matter, he breathed in and out, shook his head and stepped back.

"Where are you going? Don't you want me? Don't you want to be with me?" the woman was whispering passionately. "Come to me! Come here! I will give you the eternal rest and wellness! You'll have everything you want. You want it, I can see it! I see how thirsty you are! I can see the lust for me in your eyes! I can see it! Come over...!"

Saosh turned his back to her and ran away. His teenage shyness and lack of

experience overwhelmed. Besides, he could sense there was something wrong here. If he surrendered to the temptation he would have never come back from that world and stayed in the arms of that irresistible woman forever. It would have been the scariest thing that can happen – he would have lost himself. And this is the last thing he wanted! Since he was a child he knew his life was going to be something special, something different from others! He wanted to become someone, to achieve something outstanding. Now, when he was about to seize the opportunity, he would have never let it slip! Even for that beautiful woman!

He ran away as fast as he could, further and further from that place. He could still see the silvery shine of her face and hair. He could still hear her welcoming voice behind his back: “Where are you going? Stop, you silly! I will give you rest and wealth! Come to me! Come to me!” But it only made double his speed. Now he could only hear his convulsive breath. His heart was beating like a church bell, resounding in his head, ready to jump out of his chest. The blood was rushing through his veins, and his legs worked for him as never before.

Finally the silvery shine started to fade. It was getting duller and duller until it finally disappeared. He could see the emptiness again. He stopped and stood still. He looked around, not knowing where to go next. He was absolutely confused. He was almost desperate when suddenly he clearly heard the warm and familiar sound of the Jew’s harp. The Force raised him, span him in a whirlwind of energy and dragged him away. Next thing he knew he was in the cave again.

It was like a *deja vu*. Kudai Kam was sitting in front of him, examining him closely, just like the previous time.

“How was it?” he looked at the young man ironically.

“Ugh, that’s a real seduction! It was so tempting! I’ve never felt anything like that before!”

“She is something!” the old man laughed. “Remember once and for all: women are dangerous! You should also control your energy and not let them take advantage of you! Always be tough! Otherwise you’ll be a spineless worm!”

“I get it, but would I be able to do it with her? I think it wouldn’t work out!”

“Right! You did the best you could. You ran away! Hahaha!” the shaman laughed.

“You find it funny, don’t you?!”

“Why wouldn’t I? What, shall I be sad?” “What if I agreed to stay?”

“That would have been the end”. “The end?”

“You would have stayed there forever”.

“Hm. What would it look like here, in the material world?” “It wouldn’t look like anything at all”.

“How is that?”

"Your soul would have stayed there. Umai would have taken your Kut, and your other souls would have flown back to their Gods who gave them to you for temporary use".

"What about my body?"

"Your body? It would have just died. It can't exist without souls". "Jesus, how creepy!"

"Remember my words! Be firm as a rock with women, resist temptations! Their sweetness and all this relaxing impact is killing! Once you surrender, you'll be like a pussy yourself!"

"I get it, Kam! Thank you! You saved me!"

"You did a good job too! Well scared man!" the old man laughed aloud again, rolling on the floor like a child, wiggling his legs.

"There, there," the young man muttered, embarrassed again. "That's enough. Stop it!"

When the laughter fit was over, Saosh continued his "interview".

"Tell me, what else is there in your shaman picture? What else do I need to know?"

"Umai lives in heaven, which is the closest to earth, because she needs to manage our routine herself. So the subtle world is very close to us. But Umai still lives higher than big Ayamis: Aymi of Altai, Sayan, Baikal and other big places. Then we have the material level. Here it's more or less clear, and you've seen it all, you live here. No need to explain. Below the material level, there are levels of the underground world".

The Material World is No Heaven...

"Tiny mean spirits, the messengers between the material and the afterlife worlds, are the closest to us. They constantly sneak in and out, feeding themselves with people's energy of suffering. They are unbelievably happy when someone feels bad. They are celebrating! They scream with joy and attack their victim. They drink people's sufferings as blood".

"I see! So vampires don't really drink blood itself, they drink energy, right?" the young man whistled.

"Right".

"I've been thinking a lot about it. Why haven't I ever met a single vampire? Why did they make so many fairy-tales about them? Now I understand".

"Yes! These creatures are numerous, and they're wandering very near. They don't only feed themselves with people's "low", malign energy, they also "train" them to feel negative about everything all the time. It means that this person will also go to the underground world after death, instead of going to heaven".

"Really? Wow, this is scary".

"Yes, my friend. Watch out", the old man "consoled" him. "What are other

creatures? Have I ever heard of them?"

"Of course, you have. You haven't heard of them. You have also fed them yourself, `` the shaman looked at his apprentice with a mischievous sarcasm in his eyes.

"Wait, I'm serious! Please, don't mess with me now!" the young guy begged.

"I'm not joking at all".

"Tell me, please, who are they?"

"Lower spirits. They are demons who send various miseries to people. Spirits of diseases. Every disease has its spirit".

"Wow! That's quite a few! There are so many diseases! And each of them has a spirit! That's a whole crowd!"

"Yes, that's a lot! Vampires are also among them because they scare people to death and then drink the energy of their sufferings.

"Does it mean one simply shouldn't suffer to feed them?"

"It's very easy to say! Yes, that's right, but how can anybody live without suffering?"

"Right".

"There are also mermaids and undines. They kidnap people and drag them to the bottom. They drown them and then "marry" their victims".

"Oh, dear!" Saosh shuddered. "Anything but that!"

"There are also spirits who provoke erotic dreams and then drink the energy they get. They are called incubuses and succubuses".

"Who are they?"

"They are also creatures of the lower world. They appear at night, looking very seducing. They create the brightest sexual impressions in the sleeping person's mind. While they see an erotic dream, they suck their energy. They also prompt erotic fantasies in the daytime to get more energy. They are enjoying your energy while you are immersing yourself in sweet dreams about someone or anticipating a date".

"And then – oops! – the dream hasn't come true! And the girl has left for another man".

"Yes, but the energy was already wasted. Then the person feels empty and disappointed".

"Yes! Some people are complete idiots! They even try to commit suicide. One of my classmates was cutting his veins because of that stupid ass! They were barely on time to save him!"

"Yes, dark creatures are always awake and trying to gain as much human energy as they can".

"Wow!" Saosh clicked his tongue. "But tell me... It's not this person's fault that he sees something in his dream, is it? He is sleeping indeed! How can he control anything?"

"It doesn't matter. They don't care about it. The more erotic dreams you

see, the better it is for them”.

“How can one recognize the lower spirit if they “visit” someone?”

“It’s easy. A lower spirit’s voice is creaky and ugly. They stink, too. They provoke all the lowest negative emotions in a human being – pain, sadness, offence, disappointment, jealousy, possessiveness, greed and other various conditions like that. All those feelings can’t make anybody happy. They only take away one’s energy, health and luck”.

“So, what should we do?” “Nothing”.

“How’s that possible?” “I mean it. Nothing”. “But why?”

“A human being can’t really fight it. The problem is that people enjoy being in those states of mind. Only when they feel bad, unbearably bad, should they go to a shaman. Spirits always trap a human, delude them, and then, when reality strikes and illusions are ruined, they are feeding with their sufferings”.

“Are you nothing can be done here?”

“Well, it could be if people actually wanted it. But people don’t know anything and go with the flow, passively, all their lives. That’s how it works, my friend. That’s how it works”.

Saosh went silent and got lost in deep thought.

Fly Agarics

Coming up to the nomad’s camp Saosh Yant saw that the behaviour of the deer was quite strange: they were staggering without reacting to anything, as if they were drunk.

What’s wrong with them? – he asked Kudai Kam, who was sitting near the tent.

Stuffed with fly agarics – answered Kudai Kam. – And now drifting away. We need to protect them from the wolves since they are easy prey now.

I heard that the shamans also eat fly agarics before the ritual.

Poor shamans do sometimes, even drink alcohol, but good shamans use the help of spirits.

But why do they do this? – wondered Saosh Yant.

Fly agarics cause a state of fuddle, and it helps to enter the world of dreams as the perception becomes more fluid. A person forgets where he is, who he is, and who his mom and dad are. That means he throws away all the shackles that hold his perception in rigid material boundaries, and it is easier for him to get into the world of dreams. But a good shaman must be able to disable his personality, which prevents his flight. And he does this by going into a trance, playing the jews’ harp and the drum, calling Tyn Bur and the spirits that will carry him to heaven or the world of the ancestors.

Does that mean that all alcoholics and drug addicts enter the world of

dreams and fly like shamans? – asked Saosh Yant.

You don't say so?! – laughed Kudai Kam. – Really, they can enter there but can do there nothing, wandering aimlessly in the world of dreams. On the contrary, a shaman always has the aim of his visit, concentrating on what he wants to get and what he has to do. Maybe he wants to know from the spirits where the missing person is, or he is curing the person or rescuing the soul stolen by erlik. And he shouldn't lose his aim, no matter what happens. He makes special preparations for this and performs his ritual. And a drug addict, like a limp leaf torn off the tree, wanders in a dream without controlling himself and completely falls under the power of dreams without being able to do anything. A person must have time to work on himself in the normal state, learn all rituals, and be able to go into a trance, clear himself and only then enter the world of dreams. And they do nothing, hoping that everything will happen by itself, or just like kids watch the cartoons of the world of dreams. It's useless.

And do fly agarics and other herbs of Power have their spirits, who can teach and help the shaman?

Yes, all plants have their own spirits, and each of them can help and teach, but you need to know how to get in touch with the spirit. You should be a good shaman, and then all spirits will help you. But the most important thing is the aim and the ritual that will set you up to achieve this goal. Everything has meaning and value in a ritual and shouldn't be missed. And most importantly, you must have a pure soul, otherwise, evil spirits will tease you, using your weaknesses and vices. They will seduce you, frighten you, lead you aside, cheat you, and you will turn into their toy, which happens to drug addicts and alcoholics in delirium. You must be able to be detached from any images occurring in the world of dreams and keep sobriety. In ancient times, plants of dreams were taken only with a ritual under the guidance of a shaman at a certain time, say, at the time of the full moon, and only by those people who needed it, for example, the sick. And now everything is forgotten, as the most important thing here is a state of mind. Without it, these plants can destroy a person. Before the ritual, the person took time to prepare, clear himself, and focus on his task.

The World of the Dead, or the Temporary Shelter of the Souls

The sun was slowly setting. As if slowly but surely someone were pulling it down with the invisible strong threads, to the ends of which heavy weights were attached. The day star majestically and solemnly was leaving for its night place. The evening was giving its unique concert. The birds

slowly became silent, leaving the priority to it. Their voices became quieter and rarer. There was silence and peace in the air. All colours around began to change. The entrance to the cave and the dark-green tops of the fir trees seen from it were painted in pale pink and then in crimson colours. And everything around sounded completely different. The day was burning down with crimson colour on everything that the sun's rays touched. The solemn and majestic fading of the day star was accompanied by the thoughtfulness

and depth of the surrounding nature. Saosh was lost in thought.

"And so will I leave this world – he thought – my time will also come. Although, of course, I'm still young, and it won't come soon... but who knows?... God moves mysteriously! And only God knows who, when and why will leave this life ... I wonder what will happen to me after death?..."

Saosh was silent. His thoughts also remained silent. Frisky horses stopped for a while, gaining strength. The young man stared ahead in complete silence. It was very difficult to say how long he was sitting in such a way. But after a while, his ability to think returned to him. Horses galloped and trotted along.

– Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, and what goes next? What else haven't we considered with you in the world structure? It's not the whole shamanic mandala, is it?

– No. Next, below, is the world of the dead.

– Oh-Oh-Oh! I've just thought about that – Saosh jumped out of his skin.

– It is a world where the souls of dead people, animals, insects, plants and other living beings from our world go. For some time, they stay in close proximity to the earth. Those who have especially a soft spot for it stay here for a long time. They suffer because of lost opportunities and wealth. And since their energy ends, it is necessary for them to take it from somewhere. So they take it from people living on earth.

– A-a-ah! How scary! – Saosh screwed up his face in revulsion. And how do they get it?

– In a very simple way. They scare people badly. They haunt them, browbeat, inspiring despair and other negative emotions. Send bad thoughts to the person. And they are fed by their sufferings.

– Ah! Yes, I understand – heuristically said the boy. – I remember, I was a kid. Our aunt died in spring. She was a wealthy lady. And after her death, such cold weather came! As if the winter was back again. Before it, everything had already begun to blossom, but then again, frosts came, and there was even snow in May. The nature was in a rage. The strong wind was blowing, uprooting lots of trees. When we came to the funeral feast, I was terrified of her corpse. I thought she was about to get up and grab me with her claws. Or teeth... I don't remember – he gave a wave of his hand. – I mean, she had already been buried, but the fear stayed with me for a long

time. Or was it me who stayed with it? Ah! Doesn't matter. I was scared for a year or so. And I remember all our relatives were afraid to say her name out loud. They were afraid she could come. It is what it is.

– Yes, that's right. She was near the earth the whole time. But worse things happen.

– Worse? – the youth laughed.

– Yes! Spirits can live in such a way for years, even centuries, feeding with fear, horror and disgust of people.

– And does this spirit suffer?

– Of course, it's always hungry. It can neither separate from the earth nor does he know where to go further. That is why the burial ceremony is so important. It came to our time from old customs. From shamanism. These were us, shamans, who first turned our hands to this difficult business – to accompany the soul of the deceased in the necessary direction.

– Will you teach me that?

– Of course. You bet!

– Good. Then tell me what else I have to know.

Akashic Records

– Further below, in the underground layers, there are the Akashic records, which is the world of bygone events that happened a long time ago.

– What's that? What's the point of all this? – Saosh shrugged his shoulders in bewilderment.

– It is a kind of “information storage”, “a data bank”, which contains everything that ever happened in this world.

– Like an archive?

– Yes. Everything that happened before, many thousands, even millions of years ago, can be read in it. It's the memory of our Earth.

– And what will I get if I have keys to this “archive”?

– You?.. – Kam attentively looked at the boy with his piercing look as if x-raying him. And again, this unusual sinking feeling swept Saosh from head to toe. It made his spine crawl. As if he were a bug, examined under the microscope. – This will give you nothing. It's not the Internet to surf it back and forth.

– But it looks, as if it were – persisted the boy. – All your descriptions say that. A data bank. An archive. An information store.

– The difference is that there is no entry for strangers, – snapped Kam.

– And what else is interesting about this place?

Instead of answering, Kam didn't say a word, keeping stern silence.

– For example, – Saosh went on to reflect – the Internet has no feelings. And this, what's it? You know... I mean, does this archive have any feelings?

- Noodle! – the shaman only threw up his hands. – Such slobs like you and the like have feelings, even better to say, low feelings!
- Tell me, please! It's very interesting for me, – said Saosh, almost losing his patience.
- Well, listen. As long as people living on earth, remember the object or the person, and it remains close to the earth. I mean, when this event, person or object is filled with emotions of the living, they still continue to “be alive”.
- What do you mean?
- For example, a house has burned down, and people are grieving about it. That means the house still remains in close proximity to the earth. Or something has broken down, a car, for example, has come smashed, or a very expensive ring has drowned, and so on. While the owner is going crazy over it, the thing still remains near the earth. Or we've lost some person – we miss him. As long as our feelings are alive and filling them with our energy, these things are in close proximity to the earth. But once we have calmed down, for example, everything changes.
- What do you mean?
- For example, a person who bought a new car that is better than the previous one and calmed down. Or moved into a new house, began to live a new life, started to forget about an old house and had completely forgotten about it. Or people grieved for a while about the deceased and calmed down, “let him go”.
- Wow, how cruel of them!
- No, not cruel. On the contrary, “there,” – Kam pointed to the sky – it will be much calmer and easier to live for him.
- Really?
- Kam nodded and continued:
- And when the emotional connection with the earth breaks, just a kind of shell, “matrix” remains, which is sent to the “archive”.
- Ah, that's what it is... – Saosh said thoughtfully. – And how to work with this archive then, and what do people who work with it feel?
- That's just the point, and they don't feel anything. For example, do you have any feelings for Alexander the Great?
- No! – Saosh vaguely shrugged his shoulders. – I don't have any feelings even for the “grandfather” Lenin, – he added, smirking, – although “the leader of the revolution” lived not long ago, and my parents told me about him.
- There now. And do you feel something for the seven wonders of the world?
- No, – the boy shook his head. – Except for irony. Compare wonders created now and then! – he laughed.
- And for Atlantis?

- By the way, as for Atlantis! Many still argue about its existence.
- But that's not the point now.
- Yes, yes, I got that – Saosh flourished his arms. – And if you know how to get into the whatsit?..
- Akashic records.
- Yes, Akashic records. Will you know everything that ever happened on Earth?
- How nimble you are! No one is going to let you there! – the old man burst into laughter and tousled his hair.
- And if I pray? – Saosh moved away a little shyly.
- No, my boy! Pray or not, you will be let to know only what you really need to know. Or that person you pray for. But no one is allowed there just for fun.
- Just like the MIA archive.
- Worse, my boy, worse! – Kam gave him a wink, and they both burst out into loud laughter.

Erlik's Sons and Daughters

- Then go Erlik's sons and other mighty evil spirits, demons, that destroy the material world according to their plan. Close your eyes.
- Hardly had Saosh closed his eyes when he heard painfully familiar sounds of jews' harp. And again, as in previous times, he was carried away by the unknown powerful force. Rapid whirlpool, flies, noise in his ears – and he appeared in front of strange men. There were ten of them. Each of them had a black national dress without any decorations and ... an IRON HEAD!.. Saosh didn't know what to think.
- He-llow, – he nodded ambiguously. Men silently nodded in reply.
 - My name is Saosh, – he offered his hand.
- There was no response. Better to say, instead of the anticipated handshake, he felt a chill down his spine.
- Kudai Kam sent me to you – a “would-be protege” was trying to make contact. – And who are you?
 - We – said the eldest of them, the largest and the highest one – are Erlik's sons.
- Again vague silence hung in the air.
- And what do you do?
 - We guard the afterlife world. Keep the order there.
 - What kind of order are you talking about? – Saosh shrugged his shoulders in bewilderment.
 - We help our father. We make sure that everything, every phenomenon and every person leaves your world in time.

– Wow, – Saosh jumped in amazement – you mean, your time has come, welcome to hell! Am I right?!

—Both yes and no. We also make sure that no one leaves your world before his time comes.

– I CAN'T UNDERSTAND.

– There are a lot of uzut in your world. These are the souls of dead sinners, bound to earth. They take revenge on the living because of impotent rage. Roaming about the yards and the houses. Trying to scare people into feeding off their energy. Making road accidents, terrorist attacks, riots and even blood feuds. And to prevent this from happening, we make sure that the uzut doesn't spoil your life.

– But WHY do you do this?

I've already told you: everything must be in due time. It's Erlik Khan who decides who, when and why should leave life – he but not some shallow uzut. Of course, previously, people respected us more. Each home and family had its own patron, Erlik's son, the family had its own patron, Erlik's son, whom the family worshipped. And sacrificed. And now people have forgotten everything. We are no longer worshipped. They remain without a guard. That is why there are uzuts in your world left and right. That is why so many misfortunes, accidents, and tragedies happen to you. People should remember and honour us, Erlik's sons.

– And does Erlik have only sons? Does he have daughters? – asked Saosh with curiosity.

– Yes, he does. Why not? Of course! Look.

He threw his hand in the air, and two beautiful girls appeared in front of Saosh. Their hair was pitch black. Their braids winded around their skinny bodies seven times. They were also dressed in national black clothing without any decorations. Their beauty was simultaneously attractive and a kind of ... vicious. He could feel their dissoluteness and loudness. With a floppy walk and scornful grin, they looked at Saosh attentively.

– So, here you are? – one of them, the eldest one, gave him a wink.

– Yes...

– And what did you want to know? – flung off the other one.

– I'm just interested in what you do...

– How curious you are – the first one clicked her tongue.

– I'm going to become a shaman! I am Kudai Kam's apprentice!.. – all attempts of Saosh to gain in profile only more provoked the girls.

– And we can make you suffer from headaches, don't you want it? – the girl moved to him.

– Stop, stop where you are! – Saosh cried to her, shooting out his arm with a palm forward.

– Or we can mix everything up at your place. Make such a mess that even our daddy won't cope with it! Ha- ha- ha! – the girls laughed out loudly.

Saosh stood there, not knowing what to say.

– No, wait, sister, let's keep him for the night. Let's see what he's like. What do you think? "I am Kam's apprentice, and I am Kam's apprentice!" Let's look at what he can do – snickered one of them, raising the bottom of her dress and showing off her skinny bony legs with knobby knees.

– Yes, yes! – replied the other one. And she immediately started to motion to the boy with her finger. – Come to us! Come, little shaman. So young. So frisky! Nimble. Come quickly!

Saosh began to feel as if something was drawing him into a kind of sticky slush. And it spun, twisted him in a whirlpool. He could feel everything, could understand, it was vile and disgusting for him, but he could do nothing about it. He couldn't resist that state. Like a helpless puppy, he was floundering in the filthy, sticky waves and felt that he was sucked into that deathful swirl more and more.

Return from Erlik's Daughters

In horror and despair, he struggled with his last bit of strength, trying to break free from that whirlpool. But with every jerk, he felt more and more that he became weaker, that the circle was narrowing, that he was pulled into the centre of the deathful swirl. With his last bit of strength, he cried out in despair and fear. Sticky slush reached his throat. He took the last breath and... He was swirled into the centre of the whirlpool. He completely lost his sense of space, and everything he could feel was that quick twirl that was spinning him at incredible speed. Then there was a kind of slump. His senses faded, and everything was over. He fell into some kind of emptiness and blackness...

The measured splash of the stream and the coolness of the waves awakened him from deep hibernation. With great difficulty, Saosh opened his eyes. The green foliage, the bright sun shining through the tree branches, the singing of birds and the searing coolness of water whirled into his mind.

– Where am I? – he could hardly speak, barely understanding what was happening to him. Saosh raised his head and looked around.

Kudai Kam was next to him. He was looking at the boy attentively as if x-raying him. But as if from that glance, Saosh "awakened" from his suspended animation. The old man scooped up the water with the bucket from the stream and watered the body of the young man. Saosh looked at himself and saw that he was completely NAKED!!! Immediately he jumped up like a scalded cat.

– AH-AH-UH-AH! – came out of his mouth.

- Well, thank God. At least you came round – the shaman nodded approvingly.
 - What’s going on? What am I doing here? Where are my clothes?
 - Here they are – Kam pointed at his clothes a little slightly. – It’s very strange of you to act like this. Since I can see you not only naked but your whole inner world. And it is much “worse” – the old man popped his eyes out and grimaced.
 - But it’s indecent – Saosh was frantically getting into his panties – and if anyone saw?
 - Phe-e-e-w! What’s interesting to see? And what do you have there that no one has ever seen?
 - Anyway... – Saosh blushed shyly.
 - And do you think that somebody can come here? It’s just impossible!
 - Why? – identifiable and anxiously putting on his trousers mechanically asked the boy.
 - Because I’ll notice this person before he even thinks about it, and then I’ll give a command to my spirits to stop him. So he won’t even dare to come here. He will remember that he’s got a very important business or will just feel sleepy and go to bed. Or will simply forget his wish. So don’t worry about it.
 - Ok then, – saddling himself with the undershirt, said Saosh. – Tell me, please, what happened to me? Where was I?
 - You were visiting Erlik’s offsprings. His daughters invited you.
 - Did I agree? – the boy’s hair stood on end.
 - Yes, – easily and simply replied Kam.
 - But how is that possible? I didn’t want it.
 - You were looking at their knees. They lure everyone in such a way. Seduce men and lure them to their place.
 - But what brought me back from there?
 - Didn’t you understand?
 - No, – Saosh shook his wet head.
 - Can you see that backwater? – pointed Kam.
- Saosh looked and saw the backwater made of stones. In a quiet secluded place of the stream, where the current was not so rapid, a small piece of verge was careful, in several layers, fenced off by a small wall of stones, forming a comfortable, quiet backwater.
- This is here, where I was soaking you off.
 - Did you also manage to make this backwater?
 - What for? – Kam raised his eyebrows. – I had made it long beforehand. If I were making it now, you’d have been a long way from here. And it would be much more difficult to bring you back.
 - And did it take you long to “bring me back”?
 - Not very. You were not very far. As soon as you closed your eyes and

went into a trance, I brought you here.

– So you knew it was going to happen?

– Sure. After all, you're still just learning. That's OK. It happens to everyone, – the old man shook his head coolly. – So, have you dressed up? Shall we go?

– Yes, sure... – vaguely muttered Saosh and stumbled after the shaman. The higher they were going, the more Saosh was coming round. The feeling of his body returned to him, and the strength again began to increase.

Having entered the cave, they began to cook their dinner. Saosh was breaking branches for the fire, and Kudai Kam threw them into the hungry flames. The water in the boiler was gradually starting to come to life, lazily tossing and turning. When it finally started to boil, several pieces of young mutton and, after a little while, a couple of wisps of odorous roots and a handful of seeds and herbs fell into its captivity. While all that stuff was cooking, Saosh again started to ask questions.

– Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, and who are they, these Erlik's daughters, that they can affect people so badly?

– They're his guides. They come into the world of people all the time.

– And what do they do?

– Nothing! – Kam flung off coolly.

– What do you mean by "nothing"? – the young man was taken back.

– They get naughty, and vandalize. Hang around. Left to themselves. They come out at night, from the ground when everything in our world falls asleep. They have bony bodies.

– Yeah, I've noticed! – the young man smirked.

– Their gait is fidgety, and floppy. Spin in all directions. As well as their feelings. Now they are laughing incessantly, hooting, romping, now they start crying. Sitting on the bitter stone and crying buckets. And at this time on earth, bad weather begins. Rain, wind. The storm is beginning. Uprooting the trees from the ground. Deadwood is falling like grass. Impassable windfall occurs in the taiga. They choose high and steep rocks – it's their favourite place. And in cities, they choose roofs of skyscrapers. They force immature teenagers into bad actions. Make them take their own life because of nothing. And hide in dark impassable thickets, in deep, dense gorges. But as soon as the dawn breaks, they rush headlong to their underground passages and hide in them, as the sunlight is worse than death for them. And Erlik is their closest and dearest father. That's whom you met.

– So if you hadn't interfered, they'd have, you know, me?..

– I don't – the old man mimicked Saosh.

– I mean...

– I can't understand.

– Would you have eaten me? My end would have come?

– Everything depends on you. A lot of shamans get lost because they agree to go with them.

– What does it mean to go with them?

– You know Erlik's daughters lure shamans. Seduce them. Promise a lot. Both power over the world, a glut of wealth, and sweet frolics. Promise everything, if only they stayed with them. And when they agree, they stay with them forever. And never return to the material world. And their body dies in this earthly world.

– DIES? – Saosh Yant cried in horror. – And you DELIBERATELY sent me to it?! – Saosh was in a state bordering with anger.

– Of course!

– BUT WHY?!!!

– I'll tell you. First of all, you had to be vaccinated against their charms. You got it. In future, it will help you. It will secure you against such tricks. Secondly, you are not spoiled yet, and the hunger for carnal pleasures has not ruined your mind. You're pure. This is very rare in our time. And thirdly, I was with you all the time, and I watched everything that was happening to you. You see, I had brought you to the creek beforehand and lowered you into the water in time. Washed away your soul.

– Oh, I'm sorry – Saosh was a little confused. And then added awkwardly,

– I'm so heavy...

– Doesn't matter – Kam gave a wave of his hand – it was more difficult to bring you back. But it's all over. Everything is ok now. Someday you'll be doing the same to your apprentice.

– Phew! – the young man breathed out a sigh of relief. – Oh, sorry, when shall we eat? I'm so hungry.

– Soon, soon. You need a good meal.

– Are you up to something again?

Looking straight into the boy's eyes, Kudai Kam nodded meaningfully.

– But I haven't recovered yet, and you want me to fall under something again!

– Don't hurry. No one is going to send you anywhere earlier than it is necessary. All in due time. All in due time. The main thing – don't be afraid. I will always be with you and help you when it is necessary. Be happy about that. Since my time here is coming to an end. And I have to teach you everything. You should have time to become Kam.

– Ok then, – sighed the young man with relief. – I'd better say I'm sorry...

– Saosh lowered his gaze.

– That's ok, – chuckled Kam kindly. – Our meal seems to be ready. Come on, catch one piece for me.

Saosh opened the lid of the boiler. The fragrant fresh smell of the ready mutton spread throughout the cave. Like thousands, millions of years ago, the young man had the same feelings as the ancient people – the joy of

anticipation of the ready meal.

They sat down at the fire, laid out their simple meal on the plates, thanked the spirits for the food sent to them and began their meal.

Lord of Death – Erlik Khan

When the night came, Saosh felt that his state was getting stable and his strength was returning to him. Nothing seemed to have happened. As if he hadn't met Erlik's daughters. The flame of the fire cast soft, warm flecks on the smooth, water-worn arches of the cave. It was dancing its eternal dance, which had not changed since God created it. Repeating that magical dance, the flecks on the walls were also rhythmically shimmering, creating a feeling of cosiness, peace and comfort. Looking at the reflections of the flames playing on the walls, Saosh started to doze off. The rhythmical crick crack of a cricket living somewhere in the far corner of the cave intensified that feeling of cosiness and peace. Saosh sweetly stretched himself, yawned and went to bed.

– Good night, Kudai Kam – he said goodbye.

– Going to bed? Before you go to bed, let me pray for you – the old man took out his jews harp from the case.

– AGAIN?! – Saosh cried out. He was wide awake.

– Wait, don't be in a hurry. I'll play for you here a little, and you can go.

– Where do you want to send me again? I've just come round from the previous shock and you want to send me somewhere again?! – Saosh was upset as never.

– Nothing special, my friend. You're just going to visit Erlik.

– WHA-A-AT?! This is really too much!

– You know you don't have to go. But in this case, you won't become a real shaman. Don't want me to teach you – your welcome! I won't. But just know that my time is limited. Sooner or later, you'll have to meet Erlik anyway. And you can KNOW what to do in such cases, or you may prefer to remain ignorant. The choice is only yours.

– Really?.. – Saosh was seriously wondering. He was in such a state at that moment as if he were making the most important decision in his life. In fact, that was the case. He hesitated for a while and then said:

– You see, I've made my decision.

– And? – Kudai Kam looked at him very attentively and seriously.

– I've decided to go through it. Take me wherever it is necessary.

– Really? Good. Then go to bed, and I'll play for you on the jews' harp. Just trust me. I'll take you where you need to go. After all, you know that there is Erlik Khan further, at the very bottom of the shamanic mandala. And you will have to meet him now.

– Ok! – Said Saosh firmly, lying on his bed and covering himself with a buckskin blanket.

He closed his eyes and intently started to wait for what would happen next.

– No, that won't do, – laughed Kudai Kam. – You should relax. I'm not sending you to your death. Alth-o-ugh ...

– Are you kidding?

– Not a bit. Come on, close your eyes and relax. Just trust me. Everything will be ok. You'll see.

Saosh was lying with his eyes closed and trying at pains to do what Kudai Kam asked him. And as soon as the first iridescent sounds of the harp touched his hearing, he felt himself falling into the dense and dark space of sleep.

Kudai Kam's Help

The young shaman stood in front of the giant river made of mere fire. It spread baking heat and an unknown alluring mystery. Just as sometimes suffering can be attractive and even sweet, so that river was incredibly attractive. Saosh came closer. Almost close to the bank. The heat increased. It made his face hot and sneaked under his clothes. Penetrating under the skin, it reached the bones. At the same time, flames flared up at his feet. As if they were ALIVE! And then he understood that the RIVER COULD FEEL HIM! It was alive. And even had some kind of mind. "NO way!" – he thought and mechanically continued to watch the miracle.

Here and there in that river, groans, sobs or vague wails could be heard. It spread grief, suffering and distress about the lost past, worldly life, and family members lost forever. Unwillingly the boy started to remember his family, his merry adolescence and happy childhood. "But I haven't lost anybody and anything yet! – the young shaman tried to cheer himself up.

– That means I don't have anything to woe about". Even more intently, he stared at the fiery waves when suddenly he saw a bridge as thick as human hair.

– Step on it! – he heard an unknown voice, which pierced everything around with a booming echo.

– But HOW?! – Saosh exclaimed. – I'll die here. I'll burn in this hellfire! – the young man felt a mixture of fear, bewilderment and horror,

– GO-O! – sounded the same voice loudly. – Don't look down. If you do, you will die. Don't listen to anyone whoever wailed and called you. If you listen, show your compassion, you will die!.. GO!

Saosh took a deep breath, exhaled and walked to the edge of that abyss. Here and there, fiery flashes broke out in that fiery Hell. And it seemed that

there was no escape from that hellfire. Carefully Saosh stepped on the hair and walked along it.

The first step ... The other ... The third one – the young man cautiously and carefully walked on the thinnest the bridge in his life, trying to not look down. He moved forward towards the gaping darkness. And beneath the flaming abyss was stretching. The flame flared right below him as if trying to touch him. As if vibrations of fear, which the young shaman felt, awakened that fiery sea from slumber. Saosh tried not to think of anything and kept on walking. “Kudai Kam, help me, – he prayed, – I will fail without you!”.

Moans and obsessive lamentations became stronger. Here and there, sighs, bitter sobs, uncontrollable wails, and even desperate unbearable screams could be heard. Those voices belonged to both old and young people, women and men. People of all ages cried and prayed about the lost past. The cries of children were especially unbearable. They blended in with some distinct notes, piercing the soul. Saosh continued to go, trying not to think about anything and not to pay attention to anything. At first everything was fine, but at some point Saosh began to feel that some sort of invisible Force started to pull him stronger and stronger. It was calling him in that burning emptiness. It was cutting him to the marrow of his bones. It was licking his feet like a humiliated woman, and Saosh began to feel that he simply did not have the strength to resist that condition. With all his mass, very distinctly he understood that if he looked down, he would die!

“Where am I? – he started to think in despair to prescind from that state. – How much have I walked? And what lies ahead if I cross this river?”. The inner feeling that had never betrayed Saosh suggested that he was somewhere in the middle of the road. “My God, how much longer do I have to go? I can’t take it anymore! The heat, it is just burning me up inside! And ...someone is calling me. CALLING!”. Children’s cries became even closer and more distinct. At some point Saosh even thought that his nephew Emil was crying, who died not long ago, he had drowned in the Katun.

– Not now, Emil, – Saosh kept repeating, trying not to look down. – Later! Later! We will definitely talk to you.

At some point, he understood very clearly that right at that moment, he would not stand and look down. And then he’ll die! In despair, with his last strength, he prayed, not knowing to whom:

– Please HELP ME! You see, I can’t take it any longer. I did not know, did not understand how to behave here. You see, I’m suffering for nothing! Please, help me, I’m begging you! Well?!

At the same moment the image of Kudai Kam appeared in front of him. He was standing right in front of him. Strict, calm, detached. The Great

shaman was dressed in a white woolen robe. The scarlet gleams of the flame played on his strict, strong-willed face and reflected in the bright lights of his eyes.

– Look into my eyes! – the shaman ordered strictly. – Only in my eyes. GO! With those words he began to move away, and Saosh, entranced, followed him. He was looking into Kudai Kam's eyes. Deep, calm, soulful. He was looking and he KNEW: HIS SALVATION WAS ONLY IN THEM!

Feeling almost nothing, tired and heart-stricken, he was following his guide without feeling his legs. He was looking into those eyes and felt that soon all that would come to an end. Kudai Kam started to move away from him. Clinging to the miraculous vision, Saosh walked forward without thinking of anything. He heard neither groans nor sounds, didn't feel the heat and the pain of his emaciated, exhausted to the bitter end body. Only that magic, calm, hopeful gaze was all that existed in front of him. And Saosh was walking, walking and walking...

But at some point the vision began to fade. With all his strength Saosh rushed after it, when suddenly he felt the solid ground under his feet. In weakness and despair he collapsed to the ground and started to cry.

Meeting with Erlik

Soon tears dried naturally. And exhausted, the young man lay down on the ground. Through his deathful fatigue, he realized at a moment's notice that there was neither a single blade of grass nor anything resembling life. The soil was completely black and lifeless. Although at that moment, he seemed not to be worried about that. As if his strength left him, and he sank into oblivion.

But his rest didn't last long. His exhausted, tired body, in desperate need of rest, lay relaxed on the pitch-black ground. While inside he absolutely distinctly and clearly felt that someone was LOOKING at him, with all his attention absorbing him from head to toe. That feeling was growing, extending and enlarging until it filled all his being. At some point Saosh realized that he could no longer resist it, and raised his head.

In front of him he saw a gloomy and menacing face of Erlik Khan. His eyes, burning like coals, were looking fiercely and mercilessly. That stare pierced through anyone who had an opportunity to look into the eyes of the lord of death.

"What's that? – thought Saosh. – Am I dead? But I've crossed the fiery river. And after it, as it is known, there are two ways: one to the heavenly gardens and the other to the underworld. So, I haven't deserved being in Paradise? I'm visiting Erlik ... Oh, my God, turn off the heat! It's just unbearable! For Christ's sake!"

But the most unbearable thing was to look at Erlik's face. Long, elongated, swarthy, covered with furrows of deep, like ruts, wrinkles. With a long black forked beard, long mustache, rakishly tucked behind the ears. Behind his back there was a constantly crumbling castle, in the windows of which the red glow was blazing with ominous fire. And there was a very strange feeling that the moment of disintegration never ended. The castle was destroying and destroying, but didn't get smaller and disappear. And that eternal destruction was permanent. It was impossible to understand, but it was so.

Saosh looked down and in Erlik's hands he saw a lasso – the rope with which he caught the souls of sinners, that had just come into the afterlife world. Hardly had a poor thing, who had made a mess of his earthly life, crossed the threshold of life and death, as he immediately got caught into a skillfully set trap. A nimble stop-cut, a jerk – and a helpless victim is hanging in a loop and dragging along the black, like coal, earth. Following Erlik, riding a black bull and skinning it with a poisonous viper.

The place emanated darkness, cold and despair. Saosh was looking at the Lord of death, as if he were enchanted, realizing that he had a chance to return to the living, nor even just to turn back to the fiery river. He was staring into Erlik's eyes, feeling himself being drawn into that black abyss.

But suddenly, somewhere to the right clearly and distinctly he heard the words: "Not yet!". With difficulty Saosh turned his head and got stunned.

– Uncle Mamouche! Is that you? – he asked believing and not believing himself.

His uncle, whom he knew as a child, was standing in front of him, dressed in white clothes. Strong, stocky, dark-faced. Cheerful and young. Saosh hadn't seen him like that even during his lifetime. In the earthly incarnation he was a little older. And now...

– How did you end up here? – asked Saosh with hope in his voice.

I came to help you, – he said quietly. – You're still weak.

– Yes, I understand that. But what about you? You walk so freely everywhere? Isn't it dangerous?

– No, it's all right – he shook his head calmly. – Otherwise, you're so dead.

– Thank you. But why was I called here? Why am I here? I haven't died yet.

– Your Kam will tell you this. It's not my job to teach you, – Mamouche shook his head from side to side. – Go. He's already come for you.

– WHERE?!

– There he is! – Mamouche was pointing back.

Saosh looked back and saw Kudai Kam. With such joy did Saosh look at his Teacher! He had never felt such happiness! Being on earth, he didn't

even appreciate what he had. Thought it was something ordinary and self-evident. And now... Now Kudai Kam was the only lifeline that could lead him back to earth. A straw that he clung to like a drowning man. The salvation from this hellish place.

– Kudai Kam, save me! – the boy rushed to him.

– Say goodbye to uncle Mamouche.

– Saosh turned to his uncle, got up on his right knee, put his left knee forward and put his right hand, clenched in a fist, to his chest, bowed, humbly waiting for his blessing. And at that very moment as if a kind of breeze touched his head. Automatically Saosh raised his head and saw his uncle's vision slowly and smoothly blending into space. Then was a bright flash, and everything was over.

– Goodbye, uncle Mamouche! We'll see you again. I promise to you, – hardly had Saosh said it when he heard Kudai Kam's voice behind his back.

– It's time to go! Time to come back.

And at the same moment, Saosh felt the same great mysterious Force pulling him into a kind of tunnel and lugging him away.

Rapid whirlpool, a strange roar in his ears – and again he woke up in the cave.

With great difficulty Saosh opened his eyes. Everything was floating in front of him. He felt giddy, some strange hum was in his ears. He felt some metallic taste in his mouth. Kudai Kam was sitting next to him, attentively looking at him. His gaze was a little anxious and at the same time focused and heartfelt.

– Where am I? What's happening to me? – he could barely say.

– You're back again.

– Where's the fiery river? Where is the bridge?.. Erlik? Uncle Mamouche ... – the young shaman chattered. – I felt so terrible. Tell me, did it really happen to me?

Kudai Kam nodded instead of answering.

– But why? I haven't died yet. Why did you send me to that terrible scary place?

– You had to get that experience. After all you'll have to pass that bridge several times both after your death, and during your lifetime and during the ritual.

– But why?

– Why? – chuckled Kam. – You will be saving people's souls from Erlik. And how will you do it, if you are not accustomed to that world? You must be able to cross that river without me. To be able to do it without my help and feel at ease in Erlik's world.

– Ah! There you are! – Saosh got up and sat on the bed. Wiped his face with his hand and gave himself a shake, throwing off the obsession. – And if you didn't show up when I was walking across the bridge, what then?

- Nothing – just as if nothing had happened, answered Kam.
- What do you mean? – Saosh was seriously scared.
- Nothing good. You’d fall there.
- And got burned?!
- Of course! – laughed the old man.
- What’s funny? How can you laugh at such things, – Saosh was yelling like a scalded cat.
- You’re overreacting. You see, you’re still taking things too personally. To say nothing about your journey.
- But what shall I do?
- Nothing! I’ll teach you everything you need. Your main task is not to do anything yourself, but simply to learn.
- And do you think I coped with it? – the expectation of praise was in Saosh’s voice.
- And what do you think? – the old man looked at him shrewdly.
- Actually... Not really, – the boy hung down his head. – I was scared... VERY scared!
- That’s it.
- You know, I would have fallen there without you. Thank you for saving me – Saosh fell down, became sad and silent.
- But don’t worry, – Kam put his hand on his shoulder and fatherly patted him, – you’ve got everything ahead. And you will surely be better next time.
- Are you telling me we’re going THERE again?
- Of course, – Kam burst out laughing happily.
- Are you kidding? I’ve barely survived here! Do you want me to go back in there?
- There now! I’ve told you, you’re overreacting. Do you want to be a real shaman or a homegrown magician?
- A real shaman, of course! – Saosh exclaimed proudly.
- Then listen to me, learn everything I tell you, and you’ll be fine. Deal?
- Deal – meekly, with a feeling of complete hopelessness, said Saosh. To divert the conversation, he asked:
- Tell me, Kudai Kam, and is the underworld also a part of the subtle plane?
- Of course, it is.
- How interesting! Please, tell me the whole structure.
- Well, listen. As well as in heaven all layers of the underworld belong to the subtle plane. But the subtle plane has its own “layers”, levels. Eternity, future is on top, and the subtle plane of the past and destructive forces are in the bottom. There is Erlik’s world. Above this world there is a creative earthly level – this is the present, in which the Lower and Upper worlds are combined and there is their constant struggle there. There it is! Is that why

it's so hard and difficult to live here? Am I right?

– Yeah, right. Everything is very ambiguous here and there are always tests of your way and your means. It's not easy to live here, since in any moment you can become this or that person. In the morning you are the higher Gods' servant, and in the evening you can start to serve the forces of destruction and darkness. And people's thoughts change all the time. They are constantly galloping like fleas of a stray dog, – Kudai Kam laughed.

– True, – nodded Saosh.

– And here you have to learn to control yourself. To be constant and the same.

– I see. And what comes after Erlik?

– A new round comes after Erlik.

– What do you mean?

– At Erik's the soul gives away its memory, everything it was in the earthly life and leaves everything in the world of the past. Then through Tengri it rushes to Eternity. Everything that has gone and died goes to a new incarnation – in such a way the cycle in this world goes. In such a way the process of incarnation and exarnation of beings and events happens. Some come from the world of the future, become mature on the world tree, then incarnate in the manifested, physical world. The tree, where the souls become mature, is between the worlds of Ulgen and Umay. This is their temporary shelter before coming into this life. The mother beast gathers the beginnings of five souls together, preparing them for incarnation. Then incubates them for a long time, feeds them with her milk. Makes them ripen. Guards her "cubs" like the apple of her eye. Allows no one to them. Just you dare – and immediately you will be attacked by this predator. And you'll get clobbered.

– Did she feed me, too?

– Of course! Don't you remember?

– NO!!! – Saosh laughed cheerfully. – Completely forgot.

– Then you don't need it, – laughed Kam and tousled Saosh's hair. – But your souls wouldn't have grown without care and protection of the mother-beast. And without souls the person is dead.

Shamanic Fields

– Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, if there are transitional places among the Gods on the shamanic map.

– Of course, there are.

– And you didn't tell?! – Saosh angrily threw up his hands.

– And you didn't ask the old man said, hiding a smirk under his moustache.

– But how can it be?!

- Don't get too excited, my friend. You're too grasping and insatiable. You want to have your cake and eat it!
- But that's not fair!
- All in due time. Your mind had to learn the main things, so to say, the basis. And now you can add everything else to it. Can you see this drum? – Kudai Kam pointed at the drum standing on the altar – the natural ledge in the left part of the cave, overtopping the fire pit.
- Yeah, you showed it to me.
- Do you think we should first hang all small details on it or make the drum itself?
- Of course, make the drum. It's clear to everyone.
- Good thinking. First, we should find a suitable tree, then make a shell out of it. Make birch horns on the outer side of the shell. Then find the animal of Power, your own animal. Get along with it. Agree with it. Then pull the skin on the shell.
- And so on. It's a whole art. To make a handle, to pull a string of the drum – it's not that simple. And then, when the base is ready, hang other small items on it. Figures of assistant spirits, ribbons – the konas. Make patterns... You see?
- Oh, you've just made me the base? Right?
- You've guessed, finally! – Kudai Kam laughed happily. – You know a lot now that you've learned from such scrapes!
- True... – Saosh scratched his head, remembering his meeting with Erlik.
- That's it!
- But now am I ready to know the rest? – the young shaman persisted.
- If you ask, then you are.
- So tell me, spit it out!
- Well, listen. So, what shall I begin with?
- Of course, with Tengri – enthusiastically said Saosh Yant.
- Ok, whatever you say.

The Field between Tengri and Ulgen

- So, between Tengri and Ulgen there is the world of Angels, the plane of disembodied existence, where your uncle Mamouche went. That is the world of higher spirits. The highest creatures. Come on, close your eyes.
- Again, Kudai Kam? – Saosh's voice sounded annoyed.
- Poor fool, you'll get into the best plane. Do I want to harm you? Don't you want to go to Heaven?
- Oh, you should have told it, – Saosh went limp. – Ok, as you say. And he closed his eyes.
- Imagine your uncle Mamouche. Keep his image while I'm playing for you.

Hardly had Saosh closed his eyes when again loud rich beautiful sounds of the harp filled the entire space of the cave. They were pouring into Saosh's heart, creating sweet and sinking feeling. The feeling of something lost, long forgotten, but such a familiar and close state, in which he felt so good! So good that he seemed to have left the physical world with its sufferings, troubles and losses. And there was only the highest Bliss, Beauty, Peace and Calm. And at some moment Saosh suddenly began to see beautiful golden-pink light, in which some obscure figures began to appear. The young man was about to approach them, but he

failed. He stopped to think what to do next, when suddenly his uncle Mamouche appeared in front of him. Majestic, great and ... saint! As if he was woven from beautiful golden light. Dressed in the bright clothing, woven from the same light. His face had no age. It was impossible to guess his age. Thirty? Fifty? Eighty? Three hundred?.. – All these were some conventions that were meaningless there. He was marvelous and ETHEREAL!

– Uncle?! – Saosh said in bewilderment. – Is that you?.. But how?..

– Yes, my dear, it's me! – he said in a deep, beautiful, low voice.

– What are you doing here?

– I live here, – he said calmly.

– And what do people do here?

– My dear, Angels, not people live here. From here we watch the whole material world. And when we are called and asked for help, we come to people. Help them.

– And does that happen often? – asked Saosh with curiosity.

– Not very, – laughed Mamouche with loud reverberating voice. – Sometimes we come to people in advance to warn them...

Mamouche sighed sadly and kept silent.

– So what? Don't they hear? – whistled Saosh. – Come on! They can get help for free, that's as clear as the day, and people refuse. Hm!.. Strange they are. You put gingerbread right in their mouths, and they spit it out.

– The trouble with people is that they rely on themselves too much, so they do not see or hear anything around.

– A-a-ah! Aren't you bored living here? Completely alone?

– Ha- ha -ha! – Mamouche laughed in a booming voice. – It's you who have lots of adventures there, and here we have peace, Grace and Light of God. Here we are in a completely different capacity. Since during our lifetime each of us did a great job. Heaven must be earned, my friend...

– Oh, I got that, – the boy thought a little. – Tell me, will I get here?

– If you behave – winked Mamouche.

– I'm serious!

– Seriously, I'll help you. From now on we'll see each other every now and then. And I'll help you when necessary.

– ARE YOU SERIOUS?!

– No, I’m just kidding, – there was a kind of reproach in Mamouche’s eyes.

– Sorry, sorry! I got it!

– Good. And now go. You have to go.

– WAIT...

Before Saosh could say a word, again he felt that familiar state, as if he were being drawn somewhere. A rapid flight, strange rumble in the ears, a furious spinning – and again he heard such close and familiar sounds of the harp. And in the next moment he found himself in front of his teacher.

– Ouch! Where am I?

– And where do you think?

– And where is Mamouche? I’ve just seen him! Where did he go? – Saosh jumped up and started running around the cave, as if searching for somebody.

– Fresh out. Cool down, poor guy. How sensitive you are, – laughed Kudai Kam. – If you take everything to heart, then you won’t be a good shaman. You must be able to keep distance between yourself and what you see.

– Really? – Saosh stared at Kam.

– Come on, sit down.

– What were we talking about?

– About shamanic fields- half-indifferently said Kam, rubbing the harp with a piece of felt.

– Ah, yes. Between Tengri and Ulgen is my uncle. Yeah, I’ve just seen him. So I’ve been there?

The old man nodded instead of answering.

– Phew! Wow! He was so... so... so... MARVELOUS! So bright. Kind. Radiant. Tell me, will he be my guardian Angel?

– If you behave – slightly ironically said Kudai Kam.

– I will, I will, I will try!

– Ok, we’ll see. And now, let’s get back to your travels.

– What do you mean?

– Well, you have to visit the other fields.

– Ah, yes. I completely forgot. Sure. Of course, I have. So now the fields between Ulgen and Umay?

– Yes, that’s right.

– And what’s there?

– Listen.

The field between Ulgen and Umai

The old man touched his beard and continued his narration.

– There is the World of materializing forms and souls waiting for

embodiment between Ulgen and Umai. Here they get their destiny, their mission. Their duty, their true purpose. Dharma, as it is called.

– And how does it happen?

– Very simply. The gods gather together, pass the human soul from hand to hand. Each of them in turn puts it on his palm and looks what the soul lacks, what qualities of character. What kind of experience it needs to get in a new life. And then they decide who a person will be in this life, what kind of fate he should get. That's it! From this moment on, the soul falls into the power of Ulgen and from him, passing through the field, slowly flows into the world of Umai. From the subtle idea to the real person. Or to an event or a phenomenon.

– And do events also come from Ulgen?

– Yes, my dear. You'll see everything yourself.

– HOW INTERESTING!..

Hardly had Saosh said it when the twangs of jews' harp tore the silence and lugged him away...

In a brief moment, Saosh found himself in a very interesting place. The light was everywhere. But not the same as the previous time, it was somehow tighter... No, rather, it was thickening. It was coming down from somewhere above and was getting thicker. Every moment it became thicker and thicker. From the clear blue, it was getting milky white and golden, and then some vague indistinct images, more like thought forms, started to appear. There was some movement everywhere. Everything was passing. It seemed that there was just endless rain of thought forms and images from the sky. Approaching the dense material world, they became more apparent, visible and even tangible. And it went on until a thing, phenomenon or object acquired its physical form. Then they got into Umai's world and completely disappeared from that field.

– Wow! – it took Saosh's breath away. – I can't believe!

He began to look more attentively at the process. Everything was moving, changing. And it was difficult to understand HOW it all was happening.

– Wait, wait! I need more time! – he shook his head.

But of course, no one heard him. Events were going on as usual.

– How about that? I'll be doing everything differently! – he stamped.

And Saosh chose one object and began to watch it attentively. His attention was focused on a child. Better to say, it was not even a child, but some kind of abstract half-floating thought-form. The child wasn't there yet. And that thought form began to descend.

– Oh! – Saosh thought out loudly. – It's a future human being! So that's where it begins! Wow!

The thought form became even more distinct. It was already possible to see a lovely bright face of the baby, it's tiny hands and plump legs. Along with that process a young couple on earth decided to give birth to a child.

– Wow! It had appeared before they even thought about it! THAT’S INCREDIBLE! It turns out the events come to us from the future and make us think about them? The same is with scientists who are bound to make their “discoveries”! EUREKA! I understand how all this happens.

Meanwhile, the baby was growing, gaining strength... Then the embryo appeared in the womb... 9 months passed, and...

The vision disappeared in the world of Umai.

– Good luck to you, kid! – the young shaman waved him good-bye. – May your path be fruitful...

He hardly thought about it when the familiar feeling of flying into the abyss again covered him with a powerful wave. The next moment he awoke to the last sounds of the harp.

– Are you ok? – Kudai Kam bent over him. – Come on, get up. You should wash.

Kudai Kam helped him get up and walk to the barrel of water. Saosh drew up some water and splashed it on his face, neck, back of his head. Freshwater refreshed him and revived. He wanted to take his sash...

– No, – Kam stopped him. – Dry off. It will be useful for you.

– Ok, – vaguely muttered Saosh, coming back.

He sat in front of the fire and admired the flickering flames.

– Tell me, – he asked – did I really see a future human being?

– Of course, – Kam said calmly.

– But it’s just a miracle!

– And what did you think? Just mom and dad – did fun -and that’s it?

– Well... I-I... – confusedly murmured the young man.

– No, my friend. That’s not them who wanted it. It’s that “alien” that knocked them from the future world. That’s why they had such a desire – to make friends with him – Kam winked.

– Cool! It’s just super cool!..

– Well, had a rest?

Again the old man looked at the boy with his soulful, unbearable gaze, which made his skin crawl.

– Yes, I’m ready to move on! – confidently responded Saosh.

The Field between Umai and Erlik

– Good. Then listen. Between Umai and Erlik there is a World of evil spirits, a world of collapsing forms. As well as the cemetery, war, diseases, pestilence and misfortune. This is a harsh world of transition. In Tibet it is called Bordeaux, or the afterlife world.

The old man took the jews’ harp again and played it. This time the sounds were somehow jerky and even harsh. Cautiously listening to them, Saosh

began to feel as if he were falling somewhere... In a short while he realized that he was in a very dark place.

Cemeterial cold emanated from the graveyard, where whitish – transparent figures, like people, appeared every now and then. “GHOSTS!” – the thought flashed with the lightning in the boy’s mind. They were silently hanging over their graves, waiting for the time when the contact with them will weaken and break. The wind was dragging the dry foliage on the ground, howling in the bare branches of dead trees. Everything there was destroying, smoldering, turning “to nothing”. Explosions and gunshots were heard everywhere. There was an incessant war. Rivers of blood were running along the blackened bare ground. Everywhere spirits of deceased, sufferings and adversity were hovering. One by one they dragged people from the world of the living in their realm. The realm of chaos, destruction and despair.

But in that terrible chaotic motion, Saosh saw something strange. A very familiar figure caught his eye. It was a tired shaggy grey-haired old man leaning on a crooked wooden staff. There was something unusual in his appearance. Something very familiar. Saosh was doing all his best to remember where he had seen him before... One moment

– and...

– No way! Is that YOU?!

In that old man, Saosh recognized that baby he had recently seen.

– But what happened?

Instead of answering, the old man looked at him with his sad eyes, full of melancholy and despair. The wind was stirring his shaggy tangled hair. Tears were running from his dangling eyelids. Everything became clear to Saosh from that look. He decided not to torment him with his questions. The old man sighed heavily, leaned on his staff and wandered on into the world of grief and despair.

– Good luck, my friend! – Saosh barely said him good-bye.

The old man waved irritably and went forward without looking back. In some moments he was no longer seen. Darkness and chaos absorbed him.

And almost at the same moment the rapid whirlpool picked Saosh up and carried him away from that place. Again modulating sound of jews’ harp – and Saosh opened his eyes in front of his teacher...

– Ah! – he opened his eyes with difficulty. – What was that?.. Where am I?.. What happened to me?

– You’re ok – Kudai Kam quietly and attentively looked at his apprentice.

– My head aches!

– Come on, have a drink.

– What’s that? – Saosh saw a cup with the brew of some herbs.

– You’ll feel better. Drink!

Saosh drank the brew at a gulp. The taste was a little tart and bitter, but in general very pleasant. The young man thought a little, as if assessing the taste of the drink.

– Better?

– Um. Don't know yet. Perhaps, better. I need to prove...

– Let's not waste time. You have to visit the fourth field before sunset.

– Look, will you give it a rest, Kudai Kam? I'm tired. Really. I can't take it anymore! I'm exhausted.

– But you still can argue with me?

– I don't know...

– If you do, then you are not exhausted. So don't argue. Besides, it's not what you think. You'll find yourself in a much brighter and more beautiful world than the previous one.

– Really? – Saosh made an effort to pull himself together. – Good. Then you have my undivided attention.

Fields between Erlik and Tengri

– The last world is the fields between Erlik and Tengri. The place of postmortal existence in the subtle body. Here every living being becomes free. It's free to go wherever it wants. But most often here all live as they used to live in the material world.

– Do you mean that with the death of our bodies, our lives don't change?

– No. What a person formed during his lifetime will be with him after his death. All his habits, tastes and attachments. He will even choose to live in a frail shack, if he got used to it during his lifetime.

– But how can it be? There is a great choice there. Why? – Saosh stamped with indignation.

– Habits, my dear. Habits, – the shaman tousled his hair. – Let me play for you...

Saosh lay down on the bed, closed his eyes, curled up and ... The beautiful sounds of the harp carried him away. It wasn't that long before he saw an amazing picture. Huge fields of energy stretched out in front of him. They were shining from within with all imaginable and unimaginable colors and shades. That energy was alive. It was throbbing, dancing, moving. Living! But! The most interesting thing was the feeling that you could make anything from it, with a single power of thought. Anyone could create from that subtle matter whatever he wanted. Saosh peered closer and saw completely different creatures. Animals, people, insects, spirits, and God knows whom, the names of which Saosh just didn't know. And what was most amazing, every living being created from that matter the world to which it was accustomed. The cat was dreaming about its cat's life. It kept preying on mice and running away from dogs. The dog was having a dream

about how it faithfully served its master and hated cats. People, each person was dreaming about the continuation of their usual life.

Saosh saw two old people who lived in a shabby old shack. He approached them and asked indignantly:

– What're you doing? Why do you live like this? What's wrong with you? You can go anywhere you want!

– No, dear, we don't want – gently said a wrinkled old woman with grey hair.

– We like it here – the stooped old man hugged her shoulders. – We don't need anything else.

With that the vision was gone.

And suddenly Saosh noticed an amazingly familiar boy. He was happily romping, running, playing on a huge playground.

– I can't believe it! – Saosh cried out. – EMIL?! Is that you?..

– Yeah, – carelessly said a cheerful hazel-eyed boy with skinned knees and tousled blond hair.

– What are you doing here?

– Can't you see? Playing.

– But how?

– Now no one disturbs me from playing as much as I want. Puts me to bed or stuffs me with food. Takes home. I'm having fun here.

– And what about your mom and dad? They worried about you.

– Yes. I know – a bit sadly sighed the boy. – I felt that. It was very difficult for me. But that's ok. Someday they will come here, and we will all live together in this beautiful place.

– Do you want it?

Notes of anxiety and fear could be heard in Saosh's voice. Since he understood that if parents come here, then they will die in the physical world.

– Come on. Everything has its time. Let's play football! – And a white ball with black spots appeared in Emil's hands out of nowhere.

Hardly had Saosh followed his nephew, as the painfully familiar feeling twisted him into a vortex of energy. And after a while he woke up in the cave. The last sounds of the harp became silent. Saosh lusciously stretched himself. Made a deep breath.

– What a good dream I had! – he said, reluctantly opening his eyes. – Emil? Where's Emil?

Like a scalded cat, Saosh jumped onto the bed and stared at Kudai Kam.

– What's going on? I've just.... A-a-ah! I'm here again. Was it just a dream? Yes. It's a world where everyone goes after death.

– But why do they live so strangely? They can live in palaces and they choose shacks!

– You've heard! They are used to! That's how perception formed during the

lifetime affects a person. Perception added to differently developed souls. That's the diversity of experience.

– Tell me, Kudai Kam, and souls – are they also given to us for a while?

– Sure. Gods “rent” them to us, and then take them back. And without a soul, a person is not a person at all, but just a “bag of bones”.

And they both laughed gaily.

– That's right! – Saosh said, getting up and pretending to be a zombie. – I had understood it since childhood when I buried many of my relatives.

– Right. Thus, flying apart, the souls go each to its God. And the immortal soul of Aya goes to God Tengri. See that smoke coming up and going into the hole above us? – the shaman pointed upwards.

Saosh raised his head and looked in the direction pointed by Kam. The smoke from the fire was gathering in a thin grey stream and sky-rocketing. And then it disappeared in a narrow opening forever. Smooth relief arches, made of ochre-beige limestone, darkened from soot and smut long ago. But didn't lose their pristine beauty. Decorated with drips coming down from the walls of the cave, having passed through the centuries, they saw a lot. And they outlived a lot of people. The walls gave shelter, beds and hearth to many people. They heard a lot of speeches, in different languages. They witnessed a huge number of scenes and situations. They took part in an endless number of rituals. Like silent witnesses of all events, they lived their own life, known only to them. The life that could neither be compared to anything nor described.

And just as everything in this world irrevocably goes away, and disappears in Eternity, the smoke from the fire, made by our heroes, was disappearing.

– Ah! I GOT IT! GOT IT! – cried Saosh happily. – Our life is the smoke of Gods! True?

– Not exactly – Kam shook his head.

– And what then? Tell me!

– We come here, we live. We suffer, get some experience. A good experience, pleasant for us and unpleasant, as we think, “not – good”. And then we grow old and decrepit and die. And all our experience is God's experience.

– What do you mean? I don't understand. Where is God, and where are we...

– You see, when we die, when we go through or pass Erlik's world, our soul of Aya goes to the higher worlds. Goes to heaven. It follows the Milky Way, made of sheer stars. On the blanket of

Night, dotted with myriads of constellations and galaxies, it rises to the highest Heavens. There it communicates with God Tengri himself, with other souls that have reached these sacred heavens, being in complete bliss, happiness and peace.

– Yes, I'd like that!

– You will, of course, you will. Don't worry.

– And then?

– And then the soul returns to the earthly incarnation. And so it goes from life to life until it gains the necessary experience.

The state when the soul is in these highest worlds is called “Tengri’s feast”.

– Tengri’s feast? – asked Saosh in surprise. – I’ve never heard that expression. What is it?

– Listen.

But the young man failed. He had a young sound sleep...

PART 2

THE TENGRI'S FEAST

Prologue

Kuday Kam, the Great Altai shaman, and Saosh Yant, his young aspiring apprentice, were in the Altai, in the pure, holy place – in the ancient cove. The cove, which could still remember the first strokes of the drum of one of the oldest people on earth – the very first shaman. They had been staying there for a week. It was the time of the first yellow leaves – the last decade of August – when nature was full of peculiar calm and peace. When everything alive on earth seemed to have stopped, anticipating the transition to the new stage of existence. When the first rare single leaves, which had turned yellow earlier than their fellows, blown away with the gusts of swashbuckling wind, were helplessly falling on the ground. When the foliage of the trees rustled with some sort of peculiar power and feeling as if telling the tired traveller walking along the road: “Look! You can still enjoy my green freshness and beauty for a short while. Take your time to admire. My time is up!” Have a good winter, dear!

It was the time, when both fledglings and their parents – old veterans, who had given birth to them, were gathering in flocks to start their “training flights”. As if saying: “Time is coming! It’s time! It’s time!. ” Good luck, dear! It was the time when everything fertile in nature was ready to throw down the burden of rich harvest from the branches, when the overfull pregnant soil was ready to share its harvest.

And in this calm, majestic and at the same time wild and primeval environment, the youth was grasping all details and wisdom of the shaman art. Together with his teacher Kudai Kam he lived in a wild uninhabited place of the Altai.

They met several years ago under quite strange circumstances, when Saosh Yant began suffering from so-called “shamanic illness”. What is it like? It’s like the following. A person starts communicating with the spirit world and sees what others in their daily routine can’t see. He behaves like an insane, leaves home for several days. Or he can lie silently, saying nothing. And what could his parents, residents of a small town, where there was still good relation with shamans, do? Where people, bearing in mind the power of the ancient, often, if necessary, went to the very shamans!

Watching a very strange behaviour of their son, the parents had to ask Great Kam for help. But, as it turned out, young Saosh Yant didn’t need any help. The youth wasn’t ill – the thing was that spirits had pointed at him.

And he was to learn all the details and wisdom of the ancient art. Shamanism. He was young, ardent, full of vigour and sometimes even stubborn. But it couldn't be helped, spirits can't be mistaken. They know exactly who will fit to be a new shaman. Since the old shaman Kudai Kam was destined to leave this world soon. That meant, time inexorably claimed its right – to share experiences and transfer knowledge. That is why Kudai Kam began not curing but teaching Saosh everything he knew. This was not an easy task indeed! No one should ever have such work. To begin with, Saosh knew almost nothing, constantly asked lots of unnecessary minor questions, which required a lot of time and energy. He thought he knew everything, but actually, he knew nothing. And sometimes he even argued. Although, of course, he always lost a bet. Speaking nothing about his inexperience in all the subtleties of subtle plane travelling! Every now and then Kudai Kam had to help him out of scrapes and troubles, in which the youth got because of his inexperience in such matters. In a strict sense, Kudai Kam dragged him “on the back of his neck” in the spirit world, where ideally Saosh was to feel at home. “Like a duck to water”. And to be at ease there, being able to do everything. It was like doing another person's work, but with his hands and mind. How do you like that? ...

Really! Kudai Kam had hard work to do. But with his intrinsic great optimism, acuteness and patience, he was muddling his protégé along that challenging, twisting and very dangerous road. And over the past few years he managed to teach his successor a lot of the details of his art. He showed Saosh the subtle plane. He introduced a lot of spirits to him, with whom he would have to communicate all his life and then, in his turn, introduce them to his successor. On the example of the shamanic mandala he explained the structure of the world to him. And showed him the world tree. He introduced the mother-beast, the Gods and their sons and daughters to him. Actually, the list is endless. Although everything has already been mentioned before.

But there was still a lot of work to do. And time was passing. It claimed its right – to transfer knowledge as soon as possible. Time... Time... Time...

Who are the Shamans without Drums

So, the Great Shaman Kudai Kam and his young apprentice Saosh Yant were living in a cave in a secluded quiet place in the Altai.

The day was dawning. Creeping quietly on soft, fluffy paws into the darkness of the night, slowly and surely pre-dawn was crawling in. At first timidly, gently, almost imperceptibly. And then more confidently, after all it was doing its work – drawing the dawn. And when it finally coped with its task, in the same way, silently and quietly, it yielded the palm. Fancy that! At the

same moment the first gentle, shy golden and pink sunbeams appeared from behind the nearby mountains. They tinged everything around with soft colours. The whole nature woke up from the night sleep. Birds started their everyday bustle. Trees friendly shook their green paws and nodded their crowns, and flowers opened their buds, putting their beautiful faces under the sun. The wind was rustling in green leaves in a special way, blowing away the first yellow leaves, plucking the first gray hair out of the shaggy heads of the trees. There was the smell of ozone in the air because of the temperature difference. It gave the feeling of freshness, purity and healing power of nature. The state of elation, high spirits and anticipation of something new, light and pure filled the space around. It was a new light sunny day.

As usual, Kudai Kam was the first to wake up. Actually, speaking in secret, he always slept as if not sleeping at all. How to understand this? Very simple. When he slept it seemed as if he weren't sleeping but just lying with his eyes closed. And he also woke up very quickly and easily. He just opened his eyes, got up and immediately started doing something.

Of course, the same could not be said about Saosh Yant. Having grown up in a small but still, a town, he did adopt "bad" habits. He would stay up long in the electric light. (Yes! It is exactly electricity, that changes the life of a man. But that's not the point now. Although it is.) He would wake up late in the morning, especially at weekends. It took him time to wake from the night's sleep. Doesn't that sound similar? ... But he was still young and full of vigour. Well, whatever. Let's leave them alone.

– Wake up, sleepyhead! – said Kudai Kam cheerfully, pulling the buckskin coverlet off his apprentice.

The boy screwed up his eyes and frantically started fumbling mechanically about his bed in search of a warm blanket. But as if. Kudai Kam pulled off the coverlet and put it aside.

– Get up! Get up! Get up or you will sleep your life away! Reluctantly Saosh stretched his handsome strong young body.

– I overslept again – he muttered, rubbing his eyes. – When will I wake up earlier than you? – Saosh sat on his bed, coming round.

– When you stop watching TV in the evenings and forget about your computer, – Kam laughed with his catching joyful laughter.

– By now...

– Oh, well, you're already crippled. And it will take time to cure you.

– Ok! I agree – Saosh jumped out of his bed. – What shall we start with?

– Let's bring some water since our supply is coming to an end. And bathein the stream as well.

– Let's go!

Saosh dressed hastily and took two water butts and a thick, specially cut log, used as a balance beam. They started to go down the steep mountain

path towards the stream.

Kudai Kam moved quickly, deftly and gracefully, like a snow leopard. Saosh Yant skipped as a young madcap was expected to. Since they had a breather, Saosh decided to take his time.

– Kudai Kam, can I ask you a question, please?

– Try, – Kam chuckled, anticipating his question.

– Explain the following to me, please: a person has neither kamla, nor a costume, nor a drum, he has NO-THING! But still he calls himself a shaman. How can it be?

– Really? – asked Kam in his turn with faux surprise.

– I’m serious! Really. I’ve seen such people myself. One of them even lives in the Altai, in a mountain gorge. He leads some brigade of mountain diggers. And in summer, he also takes a second job, making tours to the ice cave. He makes money in such a way. Sells herbs and blue clay to people, peddling what nature gives. Ah! Just remembered! He also tells some shaman style fables. And tells everyone very confidently that he is a shaman.

Kudai Kam was walking forward silently, attentively listening to his apprentice, without saying a word. Tense silence hung in the air. Saosh expected a reply, but Kam remained silent. This meant that he was not just listening, but simultaneously skimming the person in question. Saosh learned from his experience, that he shouldn’t distract Kudai Kam in such moments. So he started grubbing among the records of his memory to tell something else.

– Oh, I just remembered! – he continued. He lives in a kind of Altai yurta. There is electricity instead of a fireplace and a huge table, occupying half of the dwelling. But that’s half of the trouble. The funniest thing is that this hapless shaman watches ... TV!!!

Saosh Yant stopped halfway, bent over and burst out laughing impetuously.

– Can you imagine, Kudai Kam? A TV set! With an antenna, properly pimped out. Have you ever seen such “shamans”?

– Yes, it happens – Kam smiled calmly on his way down to the stream.

– But it’s the tip of the iceberg – skipping and rattling with the butts, Saosh caught up with the old man. There are even those who live in the cities and don’t have anything. Even yurta. Even blue clay. But the clay doesn’t really matter! They can’t even deal with herbs! They work only in one sports costume. Or just in an everyday undershirt and pants. The very most they have is a jew’s-harp or a sort of a “rattle”. After all, how can such people call themselves shamans?

Meanwhile, they were already down to the stream. Flowing down the rocks, water fell to light splashes with a pleasant rustling. It seemed from a distance, that the stream was of milky colour. There was a pleasant coolness and appeasement here. Our travelers came up to a quiet backwater, which

was neatly inlaid with large grey stones along the perimeter. Saosh plunged the butts, filling them with water. He raised his head and looked at his teacher, as if asking the answer to his question. But Kudai Kam didn't share the conviction of the young man. His face remained severe and focused. It seemed that he was looking somewhere into the space, where he could see the past. To the thing, that was beyond the ordinary sight.

– Kudai Kam?.. – the boy tried to break the silence.

– Ok, ok, – the shaman reluctantly answered some time later. – I was just watching.

– What were you watching? I can't understand...

– You see, earlier, approximately 80-90 years ago there was such a situation, that the Communists came to power. It also reached Altai, but a little bit later. And the Communists gradually started to prohibit all shamanic rituals. And probably about 40-50 years ago they totally banned shamanism. They put people in prison, punished them, exiled to camps and so on. And just then shamans started to perform their rituals without any special regalia. Without a suit, as you say, a shaman cap, kamla and other things. They were escaping persecution in such a way. This so to say "style" has begun since that time.

– But how can it be? It is really difficult without all these attributes!

– Of course, it is. That is why shamanism has weakened. Moreover, technical advancement has done its part. People have become weak, sickly, helpless. The power of humankind has weakened.

– But what about you?

– Me? – Kudai Kam sighed sadly. – I am a descendant of those people who had a very hard time. In order to preserve ancient knowledge, they had years, even decades, to live hiding from people. Or having a very rare contacts with them.

– You don't say that! – Saosh even opened his mouth in surprise and dropped almost a full water-butt from his hands.

– Oh, – he said awkwardly and tapped into the water to catch the "fugitive".

– But don't worry. We are not alone. In those days, in the middle – end of the last century, this wave swept all over the world. In some places even earlier. And shamans had nothing to do but work without a manzhak (shaman's costume – author's note) and other related shamanic attributes. Relying only on the help of the spirits.

– Ah, I got it – Saosh got out of the water, waist-deep wet, and started to fill the butt with water again.

– But the trouble is that the knowledge started to dissipate. Moreover, along with the normal shamans a lot of pseudos have appeared, who pretend to be shamans, but in fact they understand nothing in this matter.

– Eurgh! That's serious! – again Saosh almost dropped the butt out of his

hands, but took care just in time and gripping his hand firmly, pulled the full butt on the bank.

– Yes! That is why there are so many charlatans instead of shamans. They don't know any traditions, can't communicate with the spirits; they can explain anything.

– So they can become easy prey for the spirits, can't they?

– Of course. A lot of them are paying the price for it with their health. Some even turn out to be in mental hospitals. Besides, the problem is that ordinary ignorant people believe them. And that's the worst thing!

– With large grey stones, so what's to be done?

– Nothing.

– How come?

– People just have to understand that there are normal shamans profaners and liars.

– To distinguish shamans and charlatans?

– Yes, – Kam nodded.

– But how?

– It can be clearly seen at once. A charlatan if he doesn't have a costume. His state is also important. A normal shaman radiates power.

– Ah, there it is. Now everything is clear – Saosh got the second butt from the water. Then he put two butts on an improvised balance beam and stood up.

– Well? Ready? – the old man chuckled him kindly on the back of his head.

– Always ready! – the young man replied jauntily, like a pioneer.

– Let's go then.

They hastily bathed their faces in the stream and went up into the cave. Kudai Kam immediately started to tinker at the fireplace. Saosh poured the water from the butts into the barrel and hung them to dry. To his surprise, he found out that there were faces of good-natured old moustached spirits on the butts and the balance beam. Having smiled to them, he joined Kudai Kam. Having taken a seat near the fire, he started to break thick branches and chop wood for it. Kudai Kam started making Kocho – a traditional Altai soup with barley, in which at the end of the cooking he wanted to put some herbs – wild onion, trampoline, garlic and Urals peony.

– Hey, cut this green stuff – he gave an armful of herbs to the boy.

– With pleasure! – Saosh smiled and set about work. And suddenly, the young man remembered that their yesterday's conversation had paused in mid-sentence. – Listen, Kudai Kam, yesterday I didn't listen to the end and fell asleep or something. I don't remember. It seems like you wanted to tell me something interesting to me. And I missed everything.

– Yes, I wanted to tell you about the Feast of Tengri.

– Yes, yes, exactly! – beamed Saosh. – The Feast of Tengri. And what is it?..

– Shamans have a very wise old legend, – Kudai Kam said thoughtfully, looking at the bright flame of the fire. It is the Feast of Tengri. It has been passed on by word of mouth for centuries up to our days.

– How interesting!

– Swear you won't tell anyone about it.

– What do you want me to swear by?

– Swear by the health of your mother.

For some minutes, Saosh remained thoughtful. Then he stood up, raised his head high, struck his right fist in the chest and said solemnly:

– I SWEAR! By my mother's health!!!

– Good, – Kudai Kam nodded approvingly as if scanning the young man. Radiant wrinkles around his eyes said that he was pleased. – So, here it goes. The legend says that the Tengri are always in a state of celebration and festivity. Joy, fun, happiness and prosperity. They sit, having a feast, in the seventh heaven, exulting and congratulating each other. But sometimes they just become bored. It is really boring to eat only sweet fruits all the time. Sometimes just for a change, they want to eat bitter ones. And sour. And tart. In other words, when the feast gets annoying and they are bored with it, they fall asleep. Just for fun. For a change. And in the dream, each of them sees himself differently: one sees himself as a man, another – as a beast, the third – as an insect or a plant. And so on. As one wishes, Each of them sees himself as a creature in this dream. And lives its life. Gets its experience – pleasant and unpleasant, sweet and bitter. He gets the experience of sufferings and pleasures, losses and gains, disappointments and victories. It can be listed. And when they wake up, they start their feast again and tell each other their dreams.

– How strange, – said Saosh Yant, – I've thought that there is only one Tengri.

And you are speaking about the Tengri...

– The legend says about the souls of creatures, each of them is also Tengri.

– Ah, there it is!

– The feast is a high level of existence in which the soul knows it is Tengri and stays in seventh heaven in full freedom, happiness and bliss. The dream is a low illusory level of existence of living beings where their souls are suffering, dreaming that they are people, animals, plants and so on.

– Oh! How interesting! – said Saosh Yant enthusiastically. – But, it is still unclear. Excuse me, Kudai Kam, can you explain in more detail, please, what is in question here?

– The legend speaks about the state of soul Aiy. When it is alive, it is getting some experience. And after death, it understands that the whole life was a dream.

– Then what is the good of this if it's just a dream? Why be born, to be cut up, to suffer?

– It should seem... – the old man raised his eyebrows expressively. – But the dream has its necessity. For it is said that the Tengri became bored. That means that the soul Aiy goes to the dream of mortal life to get new experience. And new impressions, which it later shares during the Tengri's feast. They tell each other their fanciful dreams, as the feast is monotonous, but the things you get in a dream!

– That's for sure! You will never get bored here. One dream or another, – said Saosh happily, and they both laughed merrily.

– This wise old legend figuratively tells about the eternity of Tengri, which can't only be in the undeveloped state. But sometimes, every now and then, he shows in a lot of forms and phenomena of this world. Including those which are difficult and unpleasant to us. Such as disease, hunger, thirst, deprivation, war, devastation, adversity and others. Dealing with them, or in other words, by plunging into them, the Tengri souls get their experience, which feeds them and helps them grow.

– So that is why all of this is necessary – Saosh shook his head sadly. – I've been thinking all my life: why do we have all this? We suffer, suffer and does it make sense? And it turns out that it's just our experience. That makes sense. If a person gets everything and is left alone, he will lie on the sofa and do nothing. And he will be slowly failing. There won't be any development. And it's more interesting in this way.

And Saosh loudly burst out laughing at his metaphor. The old man also smiled, looked at him attentively, and then, stirring the contents of the pot, continued:

– Much of what a soul sees in a dream becomes clear only after death when it gets to the seventh heaven. And, their other souls, having returned from a similar trip and awakened from their dreams, enrich themselves with the experience of each other. Telling each other their dreams, as if watching an exciting film about the lives of their fellows, they adopt each other's experiences. That is why life, which we sometimes don't like, exists.

– That means, – said Saosh Yant – we need bad situations for the film to be spectacular and more interesting, don't we? To be more hilarious for the viewer?

– Well, something of the kind – laughed Kudai Kam cheerfully. – Wait a minute. You got something stuck on your forehead. Let me get it away.

Saosh leaned forward. The shaman barely touched his head, and at the same moment, something strange began to happen to the boy. He felt a slight weakness and dizziness. He heard some hum in the ears. Everything swam before his eyes, and he began falling into some sort of milky white haze. For several minutes, a string of rambling images and visions began to swim before his mind's eye.

Here he's a little five-year-old boy, sitting in the middle of a medieval European street near his dying mother. Her body is covered with scarlet spots. The spots are on her face, her neck... PLAGUE!!!!... The whole city is aflame from burning fires, which burn the bodies of the dead. A heavy cloud of incomparable smell is hanging in the air. The smell... of burning human flesh. Nobody around cares about his grief. Many of them simply fight shy of him, and some, having seen him from a distance, pass over him, trying to keep as far as possible. He is hungry, thirsty and cold. But he doesn't even notice it. All-embracing grief and despair pierced his whole being. As vigour leaves her right in front of his eyes, he embraces his mother and sees her. And with a secondary sixth sense, he knows that he is also infected. And his end is coming...

The next moment the vision ends, and it seems he is being pulled out of a dream. A white veil covers everything again. And then another vision replaces it.

He is a respectable old man, living in the age of Enlightenment, whose head is covered with the frost of his grey hair. He is an adviser to the King. The ruler of the kingdom himself listens to his advice. He's got a decent salary, current personal life, family, children, and grandchildren. And it would seem, who else but him could turn up his nose and delude himself with all the privileges and powers that fate gave him. But no! All his life, every single day, he sees his death in the eyes of his master. The king! And every time comes up to him, talking to him, explaining something to him or giving advice, he looks into the eyes of his death. How many people were on the way!.. It is even difficult to count. And no one survived. All became the victims of their own self-delusion, cabals and intrigues. Of too much confidence in their infallibility. In their might and power. And all of them were destroyed by the same problem. Selfishness. Vanity. And him? As for him: the great fee for his successful, prosperous life is... FEAR.

Endless fear of losing everything he has. Of ending it all. Every day he has to perceive the king's mood. To adjust and adapt to it. To select every word carefully. It's a constant balancing on the razor blade. And it's the fee for his external success and prosperity. And everything he wants now is to die peacefully. Just PEACEFULLY. Not in the result of someone's next intrigue or cabal. To die a natural death. In his warm, soft bed. In the family circle. And preferably at night. In a dream ...

Again milky haze obscured the eyes. It was time to rest. It was impossible to say how long it lasted. But as soon as the fog cleared away, he saw himself as a young Indian woman, taking ablution in the sacred waters of the Ganges. She was pregnant. His belly already bulged strongly, showing everyone that she was in a delicate situation. It was the end of the nineteenth century. Once powerful and rich, the sacred state became a degrading

overpopulated country. There was dirt and poverty everywhere. There was inexpressible toilet odour in the air. Every person eased himself where he was taken short. That is why the atmosphere around was absolutely unspeakable. But the worst thing was SMELL!!! It was mixed with the stench of pyres and all sorts of soil all over the streets. Corpses of people and animals drifted along the river every now and then. Including stiff bodies of small children,

– there was no money to bury them. Their bodies were given to “the sacred waters of the Ganges.” And it was considered normal. Right here in the same water, people washed and brushed their teeth. Nobody cared. Since it was considered to be a common practice. There were beggars everywhere in the streets. Badgemen. Paupers. Cripples. “Homebred yogis”, street fakirs, coveys of waifs and strays, roaming from one passerby to another in search of alms... There were people of all sorts there! And above all this fuss, eternal bustle and stench temples of radiant beauty were towering in their infinite perfection and greatness. Like a reminder of something great, powerful and beautiful. At the time everything in that country was different. And that young pregnant woman felt like a part of it all. So greatly grown together with it that sometimes she even started to forget where she was.

It was impossible to see anything further.

When the milky haze of the nebulous weft cleared away again, and distinct images started to appear in front of his eyes, he saw himself as a man. In his thirties. Going in a freight car together with some other people. Men. It was the mid-1930-s. They were transported to the North. To the camps, where they were to wear out to the bone. To die either of intense radiation in the uranium mines or of exhaustion at the tree cuttings. The car was jammed to the rafters. All were raw-boned, with cut hair, dressed in dirty quilted jackets and also dirty ear-flapped hats. Some had valenki. Even though it was considered to be a huge luxury. A cold fresh wind blew from a small half, narrow frozen opening above the entrance door. It blew into all cracks of the wooden car. People were frantically rabbiting together in the hope of getting warm. But worst of all, they were thirsty. TO DRINK! – That’s all that people wanted most of all. Someone tried to scrape thick ice from the window with his nails. Someone was peeing in a cup and then drinking it. Most were taking hold of themselves, hoping all that would be over soon. But some didn’t hope, quietly sitting in the corner and dying. Then during short stops, their misfortune fellows threw their dead bodies out of the cars. Worst of all was that each of the survivors envied the deceased and knew: THERE WAS NO WAY BACK! Murmansk and Kandalaksha were ahead...

The same milky veil saved him from the terrible images and feelings. But “the rest”, if it can be called so, did not last long. When it cleared away, he

found himself being exhausted with life, an old woman. It was the zero years of the XXI century. Events took place in a very good country. Maybe it was Canada? – He couldn't be sure. Or rather, he didn't have enough time to understand. Since the painful sensation brought him back to the "reality" in which he was placed at that time. He was in the body of an old woman. She was sitting in a wheelchair with her legs paralyzed. How did she end up in such a state? She wouldn't listen to her doctors' advice. She wanted to have children very much. Something was amiss with her legs after the birth of her first child. And the doctors advised her not to give birth to children anymore. But she got her own way. And after the birth of her second child, her condition worsened. She began to walk, dragging up her leg... After the birth of her third child, she occurred in a wheelchair. And now she was waiting peacefully and humbly for her end, which wasn't long in coming. The whole family gathered together to give her ultimate send-off. Daughters were crying their eyes out, nestling close to each other. Her husband was trying to control himself, but he failed. The priest was invited. And when her family asked her: "What do you want to tell us at parting? You're going to meet God!", with a quiet, thick whisper, on her last breath, she said barely audible:

"I regret not having ironed my husband's shirt...". And with these words, she drew her last breath...

Saosh wasn't destined to see what happened next. The milky haze absorbed everything. And the young man's consciousness started to fall into a kind of infinity. It rushed into the abyss, and he could not even think when it would end... But soon, it ended as well.

Suddenly, as if someone had pulled him out with the strong invisible rope, he appeared to be next to Kudai Kam.

– Whe-e-e-ew! What was that? – he shook his heavy head.

– You saw your soul – Tengerina – moving from one life to another and visiting the bodies of other people unrelated to you – the shaman was looking at the boy attentively.

– But what is all this for? I can't understand... And why was it me there, and where was it?

– It does not matter now.

– M-m-m! My head aches!

– That's ok, it will stop soon, – said Kudai Kam calmly. There was kindness and feeling for the suffering of the boy. – Here, put this on your forehead. He gave him a cloth bandage, folded several times and moistened with some liquid.

– What is this? – Saosh cautiously sniffed the cloth. The smell was pleasant.

– Put it on already! – laughed the old man. – Would I really offer something bad to you?

– No, of course not. I’m just wondering – Saosh put the compress on his forehead and leaned back. A pleasant bliss spread all over his body.

– You visited your past incarnations, saw the experience and other souls,

– continued Kam. – You saw the whole experience, which your and their souls, the Tengerin, got.

– What an experience! I wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy – the youth smirked.

– So it goes, this experience is not always pleasant. But it is necessary. Very necessary. After all, how is the human arranged? At every trifle, he rests on his laurels and stops developing. He’s got few aims. And if a person has achieved all his goals, he rests on his laurels. Or without them. Doesn’t matter. The thing is that he stops. But most importantly is that a person can’t know what will be useful for his development.

– And who knows? – Saosh opened his mouth in surprise.

– God! Of course, God does.

– And is it possible to say that a bad plot is bad karma? – asked Saosh Yant.

– The very concept of “karma” is badly distorted, – answered Kudai Kam,

– for example, it is said that a good person will be rich in the next life – and this contradicts the very concept of karma.

– But why?

A good person, a moral one, can become righteous. And a righteous person can become a saint that is lucid. And that is his reward, not the money. Such a saint cultivates love for everything and wisdom. He treats his neighbour as himself. He sees the unity of the world. Of all creatures. And this perception is characteristic of the seventh heaven, where there is Love and Grace. So consequently, in the beginning, the saint finds happiness in his soul and then enjoys seventh heaven. All this is given to him because his condition draws him there. In the upper worlds – that’s his reward.

– And the rich man? – asked Saosh with unconcealed interest.

– And what about the rich man? – the old man shook his head. – He just becomes richer than he was. And he will become a machine for earning money, living from one life to another. But it might not give him happiness because he sees the world apart. And where there is severalty, there is no love. But there is only greed, fear, hatred and other negative qualities and human flaws. And he is drawn not to the seventh heaven, but to Earth, as there is no money aloft, but only on Earth.

– And nothing else?! – Saosh intoned disappointedly. – Oh-Oh-Oh! And I thought ...

– You see, the thing is that such truths are incomprehensible to the crowd. And just to comfort the poor, they are told that all poor people will be born rich, and all rich people will be born poor. But it’s wrong! Since according to the law of karma, each tendency has to develop, and then the poor are poor because he doesn’t make the necessary effort: he lies on his sofa and

watches TV, sipping beer.

– Ha-ha-ha! – Saosh doubled up. – A lot of friends of mine have done it in a similar way. They sit in the evening in front of the zombobox, turn on the football match, put the bottle close by and just start wasting away. And as it is known, Heaven helps those who help themselves.

The old man was looking at him attentively. It seemed like he watched those people through the boy's story.

– And one of them – continued Saosh – even used to do it in the following way: he put one bottle of beer and an empty one on the floor. Ha-ha-ha!!! He did it not to go to the bathroom. And he used to tell his mother, who was nagging him: “As much drunk, as much pumped out. Good work of my kidneys!” – Saosh burst into Homeric laughter.

– That is bad karma – continued Kam when the boy's fun slightly diminished.

– Since in his next life, he might become homeless or an alcoholic.

– But what can be done?

– What? It is necessary to understand and perceive it. Then your life will prove useful. But that's not everything. Besides, we will face other pitfalls.

– What pitfalls? – Saosh flung his hands up.

– Flocks up top often used the concept of karma for their selfish purposes in order to manipulate people.

– I can't understand.

– They used to tell people from a large tribune: “Be moral – and you will become rich”. But their morality is false. For example, an Islamic extremist says that Jihad is “very moral”. And the one who kills more infidels will “go to heaven”.

– Nothing of the kind! No way! In their dreams, indeed!

– Right idea. But everything this extremist says is a lie since he teaches not unity and love but separation and hatred, which won't lead the soul to bliss and raise it to the seventh heaven. But on the contrary, it makes a criminal from the person.

– I agree! HUNDRED PERCENT!!! – the youth raised his thumb up.

– Good karma is always based on love, unity and wisdom. But not on conniving vices and weaknesses. Darwin, for example, also used the concept of karma in the theory of natural selection. But here, karma descended from body to body. But this theory and the law of karma denies God and higher wise Power, which has control over the world. You see, the law of karma, in the sense that is peculiar to the ignorant, makes a person one-sided.

– What do you mean?

– For example, a person is getting richer or better at sports from life to life. Or soaring to fame or attaining power. And, perhaps, he is degrading, losing himself to drinking, and other features and talents of his nature atrophy. But what is it? It's the road to the dead end! To the constant repetition of the same thing. It impoverishes life badly and makes it narrow, defective,

one-sided.

– I agree – nodded Saosh.

– That is why shamans say that karma is only a part of the truth. But besides, there is destiny, which is God's judgement.

– And what's the difference?

– The difference is that destiny doesn't direct a person to the endless repetition of the same situations but the new ones in which he gains new experiences. In other words, if you were a king, you would be a buffoon, if you were a criminal, you would be a righteous person, if you were healthy, you would be sick.

– It's like in those visions I've just seen.

– Yes, sure. So, it's very important to understand that every time we are given a new experience for the soul, not to stagnate, not to get stuck on the same things. Not to rest on laurels but to move on and develop. Completing new life lessons, including those which are in their different forms. In one life – as a plant, in another – in an animal's body, in the third – as an alien. In the fourth – as a spirit, in the fifth – as Ayami and so on.

– But what is all this for? – Saosh didn't stop wondering. – Isn't one life enough?

– To have something to tell when awakening in Tengri's world.

– That means that our world is so difficult – Saosh Yant continued his thoughts aloud – because here, all look at each other from the perspective of egoism. And in the seventh heaven, where there are no material bonds, souls see the unity with each other and have mutual love, don't they?

– You've guessed it right – Kudai Kam tousled his hair. – Since our dense physical world creates the illusion of severalty: everyone has his own body, his "piece of meat", his own habitat, his "toys and rattles", and so on. There is no such rigid severalty in the subtle plane. Here souls know each other's thoughts and feelings. The primary unity of the Tengri is seen here.

– And how can one know his destiny prepared by Tengri? – asked Saosh Yant.

– Destiny is determined by the position of the planets at the moment of our birth, that is, by astrology. The stars direct our destiny – that is the function given to them by God Tengri. It is the clockwork of our lives.

Saosh Yant thought and paused, watching the dancing flame and the twinkling coals of the fire. It always happens when there is a lot of new information, and the mind needs to think it over and digest it. Automatically, the youth's eyes started to wander along the ancient arches. Saosh was thinking: "How old is this cave? Perhaps, a few hundred thousand years if not older. How strange... Take this place along! Such a place! The heart of the Altai. Mother-mistress Belukha!" At that very moment, his mind flew out of the cave. It started watching the nearby surroundings from a bird's eye view.

There were high, beautiful, severe mountains around. In their majestic beauty, they lived their lives, understandable only to them, MOUNTAINS! Everything was real here. The water, the air, the stones. The wind, the sun and the rain. Nothing could stand jokes and missteps here. And every distorted thought, every wrong movement could cost a life. Like silent guardians, these mountains were watching the happenings. They decided who could be there and who couldn't. And everyone who came there was taking this invisible test. If he passed it, he could go further. If not – he returned whence he had come. Since there was no place for weakness, carelessness, stupidity and, most importantly, selfishness, the thing that encouraged many people to come here was the desire for heroic deeds, achievements and victories. They desire to prove to themselves and the world that “we can do it”.. But the mountings had their own ideas about all these “great conquests”. And they only let those in their world, who had heavenly thoughts, open hearts, and asked the mountains humbly to let them go. They opened the road to such travelers. And in the midst of this primeval beauty and power a single mountain stood high in its proud greatness. BELUKHA. The mother of the whole Altai. The heart of the mountains. Giving life to many rivers, feeding them with its power.

Never removing its white blanket. Not allowing to approach anyone with bad intentions. After all, what is “summit ascent”? How did the mountains treat this? Almost no how. Or not? Probably not. Of course, they saw and understood that some kind of an ant climbed to the top. Even if this ain't for some brief moment started to think, that he became as great as that mountain, this didn't change the essence of things. The ant remained the ant. And the mountains remained the mountains. And, of course, the mountains didn't like wanna-bees and smart alecks. They could block their road at any moment. Send nasty weather, squall wind or icy rain. They could “present” them with a snowfall in summer. Double them back, mislead the way. The things they had to fight the wanna-bees!

Saosh had heard these stories since his childhood. About the whole expedition lost in the mountains. Many were never found. Sometimes in summer people were wearing shorts for their summit ascent. They were without special equipment, warm clothes and safe footwear. And died in the mountains “for nothing”. Just one thought, one delusion, that they were summiting something. Really, things happened here!

But the mountains opened the way to those people who were sensible and humble. Respected and treated them with respect. And in such a secluded wild place our characters were staying. The wise old shaman and his apprentice. Kudai Kam took two old charred bones from the floor and started beating them one on another rhythmically. “Knock. Knock. Knock-knock, knock-knock...” – the ancient arches roared in time with the strokes.

– These were the first shamanic instruments of the ancient people, – Kam

said. – The spirits taught them how to enter the state of trance by merging with the rhythm. For these purposes, the ancient people first used things, which were at hand: bones, sticks. And later the spirits taught them to make Shaman's drums – the tungurs. Rhythm helps enter the state of trance, and the trance opens the door to the Spirit World. Sends on a magical journey into the worlds of the past and the future. Communication with gods opens a new way of learning and magic influence on the world around.

– How simple! – the youth was surprised.

– Sure. Here, take these two dry branches – the old man handed him smooth, dry as if specially hewn for this purpose, pine branches. – Repeat after me.

Kudai Kam started making rhythmic sounds again, beating one bone on the other. Saosh closed his eyes and, in time with him, started making his own sounds.

“Knock, knock. Knock-knock, knock-knock”, – Kudai Kam beat rhythmically. “Knock, knock. Knock-knock, knock-knock”, – in time with him played Saosh Yant. “Boom, boom. Boom-boom, boom-boom,” – the cave melodically sounded and sang together with them. The echo, enhanced many times, spread resonant measured strokes along the winding walls. In this primordial rhythm the sounds of the first play of the ancient man could be heard. Saosh felt that together with these sounds his mind goes somewhere far-far away, to the unknown horizons. And he sees himself to be a primitive ancient man, dressed in animal skins, decorated with various amulets, sitting by the fire, staring into the flickering flames, and, when all members of his tribe are gathered together, he conducts his first ritual of communication with the spirit world. Long forgotten, hidden behind a lot of layers of memory, recollections and feelings floated to the surface of his mind. And he touched his roots. Ancient roots.

The vision lasted only a few moments and then disappeared. Again he was beside his mentor – the wise shaman Kudai Kam.

– What was that? – he said, shaking off the remainders of his vision. – Where was I a moment ago?

– In the place where you came from – said the old man mysteriously.

– Is that the effect of the rhythm?

– To some extent...

– I'm sorry for having interrupted you, Kudai Kam. Did you want to tell something to me?

– Yes, – Kudai Kam was looking at the boy as if assessing whether he had returned from his journey. Saosh froze, looking at Kam. And again, that strange, familiar feeling struck him. As if Kam were looking at him, X-raying. This feeling wasn't distressing. No. On the contrary: it made him calm and happy. At a certain moment, clear only to him, the old man broke

the silence and said:

– Each religion uses special ceremonial music to enter an altered state of consciousness. The state, in which a person sees the invisible World of Gods and Angels. But now it has become forgotten. Only myths remained, like the legend of Orpheus, in which he only uses music to influence people. It would seem, that only with the help of music he opened the door to heaven for them. But that wasn't general music.

– And what was it like? – Saosh interrupted impatiently.

– Magic, my friend. Magic, – Kam smiled.

– And what is it? And how does it differ from the general music we listen to the radio every day?

– The difference is that general music leads us to shallow feelings. I mean, it's like a ship in soundings, which can't reach the ocean. Either there is a rock on its way or it crashes its bilge on the reefs. Still it has no luck. It can't get an offing.

Saosh was listening to Kam thoughtfully and attentively, picking at pine branches.

– When the human soul is in contact with the real music, with the authentic magic art, it is as if the captain happened to find out the channel, leading to the ocean. And he went along this channel. And then got an offing in illimitable space.

– Is this space our soul?

– It's everything. Both that people call the soul and the subconscious and the unconscious. We, the shamans, call this a journey to the world of ancestors and spirits. There we communicate with whom we want, where we want and when we want.

– That's great! – jumped Saosh Yant with delight. He started spinning around the cave in a joyful dance.

The old man was watching him attentively for some time, and then laughed. So approvingly. Amiably!

Being tired of running and dancing about, Saosh returned to his place.

– Tell me, please, will you teach me this art? So I could send the souls of people in such amazing trips.

– Of course! Of course, my friend. You will learn it yourself and will do it for people. This music will be helpful for you as well.

– Cool!

– Cool, let's bring some firewood, – teased him the old man.

– Let's go! And where shall we go?

– You'll see.

They took a hatchet and ropes for the bundles and went out of the cave.

Meeting with the Yeti

They were walking silently for some time. The path led down to the stream, where there were more trees. That meant there was more dry brushwood. They just wanted to use it for firewood. Coming up to an old fallen tree with its crooked cranky paws stretched out in all directions, they began to break branches. Absorbedly, Saosh set about that simple, familiar from his childhood work. Enthusiastically he cut huge branches at the base, then broke them away and cut them in two. Then he put them on the rope, spread out on the ground, in order to tie everything in a bunch and carry them to the cave later. Kudai Kam was standing at some distance, not hurrying to join the boy. Working with enthusiasm, the boy didn't pay attention to anything. Suddenly he felt Kam's hand on his shoulder. This gesture was meaningful and "speaking". Saosh stopped and raised his head. Without a word, Kudai Kam took a glance in a certain direction. Saosh looked there and... He couldn't believe his eyes! Better to say, he even didn't understand what had happened. In the distance, in the thicket of a young spruce forest, a silhouette like no other appeared for a moment and then disappeared. The young man could barely see it as it immediately disappeared in the green paws of fir trees. He saw an ochre-brown back, covered with thick long hair and a head of unusual size. Slightly flattened. A bowed back, huge shoulders and long forelimbs. It would be better to say arms, but ... These were exactly limbs. And this strange creature, like no other, appeared and disappeared in the bushes. Saosh could barely see it, as it preferred to blend in. And however much the boy peered into, he could see nothing more. He even thought for a while that that "something" was standing and watching the unwanted guests from behind the bushes. But that was just a feeling. It was mixed with the state of something dense, wild and at the same time scared, of unknown. Somehow Saosh even became scared of himself. Better to say, he watched himself through the creature's eyes and was scared. The tense silence lasted only a few moments. All that time, our travellers stood, silently listening to everything around. Obscure creeping murmur barely came to their ears, and in some moments, everything became still and quiet. Only the rhythmic voice of the stream broke the surrounding silence. When Saosh was able to speak again, he forced himself to say:

- What?.. Was?.. That?..
- Didn't you understand?
- No way! - the boy had such an expression as if he had just seen a ghost.
- Why? If you don't believe anything. But do you have to get to the distant stars to know that they exist?
- No. It isn't necessary at all. But people think that such creatures don't exist.
- I'll tell you what! People think a lot. They have thought recently, that the earth is flat, so what?

- That’s true, – Saosh scratched his head. – Then it turns out, we’ve just seen... the Yeti?
- And what do you think?
- I suppose, yes. And tell me, please, why is it so unhappy? – Saosh continued to break branches.
- And why would it be happy? Would you, for example, be happy, if uninvited guests visited you? Would you like that?
- Not really, – Saosh looked puzzled.
- Neither does it. The reason is why it runs away from people is that they’ve done little good to it.
- Wow! – Saosh went on wondering. – Have I just seen the YETI? That’s incredible! Just incredible! What are the odds!
- Things happen. And such things! You’ve got to see them one day! So, my friend, there are a lot of things in the world, a person would prefer not to see and not to meet.
- Why?
- Because it is not a part of his world picture, but somehow God shows him other sides of life. The things he would prefer not to notice. So, my friend, you still have a lot to learn!
- Whe-e-ew! I wouldn’t miss it, – Saosh wiped the sweat off his forehead.
- Well, well! What a go.
- So? Cut the wood?
- Made a real mess – laughed the boy.
- Shall we go then?
- Let’s go.

Saosh tied up the branches with the rope, put the bundle on his back and made way back. They were going in silence the whole way. And the young apprentice was constantly listening tensely to everything that was happening around. It seemed to him, that the Yeti was watching him from behind every fir tree, every boulder, every road bend...

Having returned to the cave, Saosh put the bundle near the fire and started breaking large branches. He piled them on top of smoldering embers. Almost languid flame lay up in them, hiding its power. But as soon as it felt the taste of its favorite food, it immediately started licking dry branches greedily. And soon it broke out with the full force. Saosh sat silently looking into the flames. To come round and to withdraw from what he had just seen, he decided to start a new conversation. But Kudai Kam stopped him with the gesture.

- You’ve got a lot of impressions. And now it’s very important for you to realize and reflect on your experience.
- Yes, a lot, you’re right. As if a waterfall had battered me. This strange meeting with the hairy beast. All these memories of the past lives. All these deep, hidden no one knows where feelings. I or my consciousness – I don’t

know what's more correct – was in many different lives. But where is real, genuine, authentic me? And how to understand: what I am now, is it me or is it the next dream, I'm dreaming? Phe-e-ew! – Saosh clutched his head. – I don't understand: where is the real, genuine me, and which is not? Who has seen the Yeti? Who has seen all these previous lives? And who is talking to you now? Lives this life?.. I don't understand anything. I'm all messed up. Help me, please, Kudai Kam ...

– Don't worry – the old man encouraged him cheerfully, – the first, the second and the third – everything is a dream. Do you think that some experiences is a dream and the others are real?

– Well, yes! Actually it is. If I am in the reality now, then the rest is a dream. And vice versa: in other realities everything else seems to be a dream... Wait-wait a minute... Seems to be a dream... Wasn't it a slip of the tongue?

– Saosh was poised to understand. His whole appearance, his face told that he was very close to solving the mystery. – Seems to be a dream... seems to be a dream... – he repeated the same phrase as if he were bewitched.

– Exactly, – nodded Kam. – Everything only seems real to you. Because you are in a very deep sleep. And the deeper it is, the stronger you grow together with the reality in which you are. But this dream is unreal. You should only make a little effort and everything will fall into place.

– My God! – Saosh slapped his forehead. – It's so simple! What a fool I am! How couldn't I understand it?

– You wouldn't be able to understand yourself.

– Why?

– Nobody can. It's very difficult without a hint. Moreover, you need special subtle energy, with which I help you now.

– And it's really true. I really feel it now. Without you, perhaps, I would be going around in circles, unable to understand anything, for many years to come.

– And it's also true. That is why, – said Kudai Kam, – the most important thing is to remember that we live in a dream. And the main purpose and intention of human presence on earth is to awaken. To separate his Tengri nature from identification and ignorance. That is to wake our soul Aiy from a dream of everyday life and identification with everything that happens inside a person.

– And what is a dream and how to escape from a dream? – Saosh Yant threw up his hands in surprise.

– For this you need you see your identification with everything: with your mortal body; with any thought that came to mind; with an emotion, coming to the heart; with any events, happening to us. And identifying himself, being in this dream, a person tells everything that is happening to him: "That's me. That's mine", – answered Kudai Kam.

– So what is to be done now? – Saosh threw his hands up in bewilderment.

– You should create a gap between real, genuine, authentic you, who sees and feels the body, thoughts and emotions, and them.

– Wow. What do you mean?

– It will take time to manage it, but if you try again and again, you will succeed.

– Ah-ah-ah... – there was uncertainty in Saosh's voice. You see, it's like learning to do flips. You'll fail first, as well as for the second time. For the twentieth time it will be a little better. And for the thousandth time it will be easy for you.

– You will cope brilliantly!

– Exactly. Here is exactly the same. If you keep on trying, you will definitely succeed.

– Ah, it's clear now.

– It is especially important here to differentiate yourself from your perception of yourself, which the society around put into your head. From what your imaginary false identity represents. Since one of the meanings of the word "identity" is a "mask". It's because of such thoughts as I am Altaian, I've got a mother and a father, I have finished a certain school and so on, our identity appears. The mask we wear the whole life. We hide our true nature behind it. And completely forget who we are. Who we really are. So, because of our whole story, all our perceptions of ourselves, all stereotypes, patterns, which besiege us from all directions, we forget about who we really are.

– Ah, I agree. I've noticed, that I was more cheery and spontaneous earlier. And as the years went by I became more serious.

– But it isn't even the point. You've never even tried to look at yourself from the outside. Haven't tried to develop your consciousness.

– Well, yes. – the boy scratched his head.- But who would have told me?..

– Ok. Then try to do it now.

– I will, – said Saosh Yant and closed his eyes.

He plunged his attention into himself and started watching everything happening there. His mind was in turmoil. His feelings were surprised and interested. And the body was sitting in a state of stress. All this was a great find for him. He has never been watching himself from such a side. He started to remember all his roles, which he performed most often. At first, he found himself at home with his parents. And he experienced a whole range of feelings that were associated with it. His smiling kind mother gives him his favourite flat cakes, and the aroma of honey and melissa tea spreads through the house. He feels calm and relaxed. Then his father comes, asks questions about things, and he immediately changes. Focuses and aims for a business state of mind. Now he sees his friends next to him. And he flaunts, showing his prowess. Now he is in his school, where he studied for many years. His state changes. And he feels

that he owes something to someone and wants to get out of class as soon as possible. It's difficult to say how long he was in that state. However, his mind began to float away into some images not even associated with him. He began to recollect some pictures from a distant childhood how he was saving a dog, being caught in a trap. How he was fishing with the boys next door. Then a kind of fuss began, and his mind swam in the flow of images and associations. Seeing all this and realizing what was happening to the boy, Kudai Kam broke this flow in a short while and said:

– Well, have you managed to be a spectator of your roles, for example, the role of a student or a son?

– Kudai Kam! – exclaimed Saosh in surprise. – I recollected it only five minutes ago, and then forgot. Although I wanted to remember it very much and thought that I would never forget it! How come?! – the youth looked very puzzled.

– Why can't I see myself from the outside, watch my thoughts, emotions, body? After all, I've decided to do it. What's going on?

– That is the dream, – said Kudai Kam. – It is your forgetfulness. Being in thoughts and images of mind. In emotions, relationships and things like that. In everything you consist of. And you need to make a lot of constant effort to remember yourself, your aim. Not to identify yourself with everything that is happening inside of you. Not to sleep in a dream of identification – then you will get a chance to wake up.

– But how can I do it?! – exclaimed Saosh Yant in his anger. – I find it difficult. Almost impossible! Really!

– For this purpose, you need to give clues, which will constantly remind you about the awakening.

– Clues? What kind of clues? – surprised the young man.

– That means that when you remember yourself, you give yourself a command that when you are again at this place, you will remember yourself; or, for example, when again you button your shirt, take up a spoon and perform other similar actions, you will wake up. You should associate your awakening with every place, every action. Then everything around will start to remind you about it. You give clues to these actions, places and they will help you. And you should thank these things for it every time.

– So simply? – Saosh jumped about with joy.

– Oh, really?! It's simple only in word. Practically it's much more difficult than you think.

– A-a-ah! There you are! – Saosh quenched passions.

– Moreover, you should know that different disturbing states will fall on you.

– What kind of states? I seem to guess vaguely what you're talking about, Kudai Kam.

– You will often have the slumberous feeling, the state of stupidity, apathy

and indifference. And visa versa, you will have the state of excitement, anxiety, negative feelings, obsession, that will plunge you into a dream. Both are equally dangerous on the way. Both of these extremes lead to a dream, extinguishment and ignorance.

– Then what shall I do when they come?

– A prayer to God Tengri, elevated emotions will help. They will balance you and give the necessary power for your awakening.

– And how should I pray?

– You should silently say: “Oh, Great and powerful God Tengri! I know Your wisdom and omniscience. I can’t cope with myself. I am constantly dreaming. Condescend to me and give me your support. Please help me become realized. Awake my Consciousness, help me remember myself. Be realized and never fall asleep”.

– Ok. I will try, – nodded Saosh. – Is that all?

– How quick you are, – chuckled the old man. – No, it’s not. Also it is very important to know all your masks and identities.

– And what are these? – Saosh shrugged his shoulders in bewilderment.

– These are roles you play every moment of your life. The son’s role is when you communicate with your parents, a friend when you are with your friends, a student when communicating with your teachers, an employee when you are at work, and a lover when you are with your girlfriend.

– Ha-ha! A lover! I wish I were, Kudai Kam, – there was a mixture of self-irony and a slight disappointment. – Yes, I had a girlfriend. Her name was Ainagul. We were friends with her. I liked her. It was a mutual feeling... – the boy blushed... – I suppose. So we used to walk holding hands, I carried her school-bag, gave her presents and flowers. But, – Saosh’s voice quivered.

– You know, since I have been overpowered by the spirits, I completely forgot about her. That’s all about the apprenticeship. Of course, with you, Kudai Kam.

– Don’t worry, – Kam gave him a wink. – You will have everything when it is necessary. There is a period and time for everything. Your Ainagul won’t escape. But you will become stronger, firmer and luckier. You’ll be ok, – Kam looked at him attentively and added, – in your time.

– Really? – there was a flash of hope in the youth’s voice. – All right then. You’ve cheered me up, – Saosh chuckled sadly.

– Now it’s very important for you to focus your energy on changing yourself. If you wasted it on girls, then your attention would all flow through, you know, your pants. And would tie you to earth.

Saosh blushed heavily at these words.

– Through... the balls?! – he asked shyly.

– Exactly – the old man elbowed him and burst out into shrill laughter. – It is exactly them which tie to earth.

– But what shall I do? – Saosh was on the verge of rage.

- I’ve already said: you should become Kam first, focus all your energy on it.
- And when I become?.. – the boy bargained identically.
- Then we’ll see. Have you noticed how you started playing the role of a deprived disturbed young horny?
- Rats! – Saosh slapped his head. – That’s true. Why did I do that? What a shame! How could I fall in such a deep sleep! Dear me!
- You’ve not only just done it, you always behave this way. Not only with me. You see, the thing is, that in every situation and with every person you have a certain identity, you wear a certain mask.
- Does each person have a lot of them?
- Yes, sure. When a baby is born, it doesn’t have any masks. It is free from all of them. It is complete, whole and lives according to its nature. But eventually, when the child grows up, starts to understand language, to speak, he begins to play roles. With his parents he plays one role. Of an obedient son, for example, if the parents are strict. With his grandparents – another one. Of a spoiled grandson, since he feels, that they treat him differently, coddle him. With kindergartners – the third role. Of a tomboy and bully, if they are weak-willed and feeble. And so on. But the most important thing is that the longer a person lives, the more roles he acquires. The stronger he merges with each of them. The more he forgets about who he is. Becomes unaware of the fact that he is not all of them. The less he feels his real essence. That’s the trouble!
- BUT WHAT SHALL I DO?! – exclaimed the boy indignantly, slamming his knee.
- You should bring light to each of these roles.
- What do you mean?
- I mean, that you have to see it and tell yourself that it’s not you. It is just one of your masks. Then you’ll have to make a list of these masks. Trying to remember all your masks and roles. Both significant and not. Big and small. Some of them you wear longer, some – shorter. Even now you play a role of apprentice. Have you noticed it?
- Oh, you know, no. If you didn’t say it, I would never guess.
- There now!
- And why is it so?
- Because you’ve merged with them. You consider them to be yourself.
- That’s right! – a heuristic insight condescended to Saosh. – But how can I separate from them?!
- To separate from them more easily, you should, when nobody is watching you, role play all of them one by one (maybe in front of the mirror). And playing each of these roles, to exaggerate them to be ridiculous. To understand that these are only roles, but not you. To separate from them and become free.
- I wonder, how will I manage it?

– Have a try. Remember any of your roles and exaggerate them.
 – And where is the mirror? – Saosh joked awkwardly.
 – This wall will be your mirror – Kam pointed at the smoothest surface.
 – Ok! So – Saosh nervously scratched his head. – What shall I remember?..
 Ah! I remember! – he heuristically raised his finger up and beamed, – a role of the student in front of the school teachers.
 – Ok, – chuckled the old man with understanding.
 – This horrible State exam! The biology exam. Oh, my God! How many questions! – Saosh tragically grabbed his head and frowned in a comic grimace. – And it is unclear, what question to answer, and what not. – He started to simulate taking a hidden mobile phone out of his sock and trying to turn it on. – And if I can't answer! I'll have to take it again. M-m-m! That's awful! – he started to enter the PIN on his device. – Rats! I forgot my PIN- code! What are the odds! The teacher! Where is she? Ah, still far. So...
 – he started rummaging in the phone frantically, all the time nervously looking around. Oh, my God! And who has created this? You can find everything on the Internet nowadays. Who needs all this cramming? They'd better teachus to do something real. Either using head or hands. To make money. I'll forget more than half of this knowledge immediately after the exam! Am I Pavlov, or what? I was a shepherd in my childhood, and I know everything about animals... Phew! What is a PIN code here? – he started to press the keys hysterically. He completely forgot that he was at the exam, and he could be seen from everywhere, like in the circle.
 Meanwhile, the imaginary “teacher” noticed him and removed the “source of communication with mini-Akasha-Chronicles”.
 – Narien Carevna! Wait, I'm sorry. Wait, – Saosh comically fell on his knees, folded his hands above his head, struck his head a couple of times against the floor and started begging her to give him back his celly. – I know everything, I do. I could only do with revision. Please, Narien Carevna. Give my phone back to me. My mother will be scolding me. Please, don't tell her anything. Narien Carevna...
 Meanwhile, the “teacher” put him out of the classroom.
 – Is that all? – he asked with fear. – I don't need to take anything, do I? But what about my mother? Just don't tell her anything. Please! – he took his “bag” under his arm and began fearfully to move back to the “door”, being happy, that “his torture with the State exam” was over. Being afraid at the same time: what will happen next? What will his mother say?
 He “reached” the exit of the cave in such a way. And then he laughed happily to the approving ovation of Kudai Kam.
 – So. Well done. You've played the role of a shy student at school. You've “passed” the exam...
 – That's just the point that I haven't!
 – Doesn't matter. Let's go further. Remember, what other roles do you play

in your life?

Saosh thought, scratching the back of his head again – “the source of his knowledge”.

– Ah! I have remembered. The role of a friend with boys.

– So. What do you remember most clearly?

– Of course, how we always used to compete, whose mobile was better.

– Come on, show me!

The boy proudly stuck out his chest, craned his chin, and sashaying, “came up to his friends”.

– Look, what a celly I have! – he said struttingly, taking the “object of his pride” out. – iPhone 6! Check it out! – he stood pompously, snapshotting himself from all sides. – How do I look with it, huh? Envy silently! You are no match for it. I am the coolest! GOT IT?!! – his state suddenly changed dramatically. He resembled a cat thrown into water. Dismally looking around, he shrunk his head into his shoulders, hunched and... BURST INTO TEARS!.. Like a child, who had suddenly realized, that his father always pretended to be Santa Claus. – What?! You’ve already got the seventh? What a simple fool I am! What a bumpkin! – a clear feeling of futility pierced all his being. – And I thought I am the coolest! – he fell on the floor and started to cry out, kicking the stones under his feet. – Mummy, I want iPhone 7! Mummy, mummy, I want to be the coolest. I waa-a-a-ant!..

Then he stood up, dusted down and cheerfully and boyishly laughed.

– It’s so cool, Kudai Kam! You can reveal any of your roles in such a way, and it will be easier for you. Really?

– Of course, – the old man said attentively looking at his apprentice. – But we’ll speak about it later. Keep your mind on what you are doing. Remember what other roles you have got.

– Roles? – Saosh again scratched his “magic back of the head”. – Lots of them. Take, for example, the role of “would-be Romeo”, which I used to play with my girlfriend Ainagul.

– Ok, come on.

Suddenly Saosh went down on all fours and started barking and growling, looking around in all directions. Looking at him, it could be said that he was just crazy. Briefly glancing at Kudai Kam, Saosh kept on his “clowning”. But the old man was sitting quietly, without moving a muscle. As if saying with all his appearance: “Come on, boy! Keep up the good work! “. And Saosh began “to let loose in full swing”. He growled, barked, “dug the ground with his paws”. Sniffing imaginary “rivals” all the time, who were constantly appearing to him around. And having sniffed them, he began to bark and growl with a vengeance. Finally, Saosh began to run on the floor on all fours and “mark his territory”. Of course, not forgetting to bark and curse everyone with all his might. His face turned red, foam spewed out of his

mouth, he was sweating his guts out to “overbark” all of them. Finally he started wheezing, simulating an exhausted dog... Then he sat on the floor of the cave and burst out laughing cheerfully.

– Something like that – he shrugged his shoulders happily and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

– Well done! – the old man said, sagely looking at him with his piercing gaze. – What have you realized this time?

– You know, Kudai Kam, I’m ashamed to admit it...

– But you have already done it, playing all this. You just have to say it.

– Ok, – sighed the youth. – You see... You know, she is beautiful...

– That’s good. Kam, who is very powerful, must have everything good. Both a dwelling, and his clothes, and his horse, and his tools. He must be successful in everything. And in love too, – the old man gave him a wink.

– I understand it only now. And then... Then I behaved very selfishly. Allowed nobody to come up to her. I was constantly jealous. I wanted to fight with anyone who only dared to look at her! Do you understand?

– Oh! So you, my boy, would go places – the old man burst out into his cheerful shrill laughter.

– And what would you do if you were me?

– Nothing.

– How come?

– It’s necessary to take the high road. To resist impulses of your nature. To be their master, their lord. Otherwise, it is possible to descend to the animal level.

– I understand it now, but at that time, I was jealous of her affection almost to every lamppost. She even wanted to break up with me because of it. How disgusting I was.

– That’s good.

– What do you mean, good?! – Saosh opened his mouth in surprise.

– Everything is good. Now you should realize, that it was just a role. It wasn’t you but the mask you wore, communicating to people.

– Ah, yes... Sure... So simply! But why haven’t I guessed about it myself? – asked Saosh in surprise.

– It’s not easy. You see, most people live in this state, not even knowing about it.

– But what about you?

– Me?! – chuckled Kam. – I am a successor of the ancient shamans. For centuries this knowledge has passed through a word of mouth.

– There it is...

– But you haven’t listed all your roles.

– Really?

– Besides the main ones, you’ve got a lot of other minor ones.

– What do you mean?

- For example, the role of a neighbor with the neighbors. A buyer in the shop. A fellow passenger in transport and many others.
- And are they also roles? – surprised Saosh.
- Of course, you were not born with them. You’ve learned them during your life since you live in the society, according to its laws.
- And that’s true.
- Now play all these roles. Or some of them.
- I’ll try.

Saosh thought a little and then scratched his “magic back of his head”. He came up to the wall of the cave. Then he started to act as if he were closing the door with his key. In a few seconds he turned around, smiled with a false, social smile and with affected politeness said: – Good day! How are you?.. Is everything ok?.. Ditto!

Then he turned and went to the “exit from the staircase”, muttering to himself:

- Rats! I’m fed up with your renovations! When will you finally stop hollowing and drilling your walls?! My teeth ache because of your “development”! Damned egoists! – he turned to Kudai Kam and laughed cheerfully.
- Well, how was I? – he asked, choking with laughter.
- Great! The main thing is to exaggerate all your qualities and flaws. Now play another role.

Saosh thought a little more, scratching his “magic” back of the head.

- Ah! Here it is, I got it!

He laid on the bed, turned on his side, and pretended to be asleep. After a while, he raised his head, listened, and said angrily:

“What a snore! Only the dead sleep so!.. Well, is that Ok?... He is snoring here, and I’ve got classes to attend tomorrow. I need a fresh mind, and they are snoring!”.

- Hey, Sir! Sir! – Saosh started to “shake” the imaginary “fellow passenger”. – Could you turn on the other side, please?.. What’s the matter?.. Nothing... It’s just your sound sleep... And snoring, by the way... Ah, well, thank you. That’s better... Good night!

Saosh laughed cheerfully, unable to withstand stress. Then he looked at Kam.

- Ok. Can you show anything else?
- Hmm!.. – the young man again touched the “magic” back of the head. – Ah, I remember!

He sat at the table, fixed his eyes in front of him and attentively started to look at something, known only to him. He spent only half a minute sitting in such a way when he suddenly cried out loudly:

- Come on! Come on! Encircle him!.. – then a long pause came, during which he kept on fixing his eyes on something, known only to him. – Oh, no! No! NO-O-O!.. Run from the right... Right, I told you!.. Eh, you fumbler!..

Come on, make him! GO-O-O-O! YE-A-H!!! Way to show 'em, rats, – again he started to fix his eyes attentively in front of him. And suddenly he jumped up like a scalded cat and again plopped down to his “chair”. – No, the bastards are still left! Smash them all!.. I said smash them... Come on. Kick! Kick it! Boys, ring around. RING AROUND! YEAH! YE-E-E-E-S! We won! WE BEAT THEM!

Saosh started jumping with joy and “hug” somebody. And then again he playfully looked at Kudai Kam.

– How was it? – he asked, thinking.

– Not bad! – the old man hid his smile in his moustache.- The same is with life. You just have to play a role. And watch yourself. The way you play it, what is happening to you at this moment. When you can play all the masks well, watching the process, then they won't have any power over you. And now you're their slave. You became the mask, lost yourself, your divinity.

– But how does it happen? – said Saosh with a note of despair.

– Each identity brings about a whole range of thoughts and emotions that control you, and it should be the opposite way: you, in your own volition, should learn how to call and play your masks. Then you will become a master, not a slave.

– And how do they work?

– Each mask is connected with your habits, patterns, way of thinking, lies, body position, breathing, gaze, and you have to learn all this, watching yourself. Only in such a way you will be able to become free from this slavery.

– And am I in slavery? – knowing nothing, asked Saosh carelessly.

– Of course! Since your identities are closely connected with the powers that live in the body. It is both sexual and emotional, and thinking power. There is also power of hunger, of different desires, laziness, inertia mounted into you by nature. Do you think you will cope with all of them yourself?

– Of course! After all, all of them are in me!

– It is the greatest delusion of a person: he thinks that if any thoughts, feelings or desires come to him, it is him. But it's a lie. Practically, a person can't control anything in him.

– But how can it be? For example, I can raise my hand at will. Can say any word, for example, “a mother”. Here you are. I do what I want! – indignantly argued the young man.

– Really? And can you give up food at least for a week? Or try not to breathe for five minutes? Not to drink the whole day or three days.

– Oops! And I haven't even thought about it! I suppose, it will be difficult. But why?! – there was frustration and indignation in the boy's voice.

– Because various powers control us against our will.

– What kind of powers?

– The powers of instincts and reflexes. The powers of desires and emotions. By

the way, they create a general background for the existence of these or those thoughts in your head. Haven't you thought about that?

– Well, you made that last bit up! I think at my own will – the young man started feeling inner irritation.

– Really? Here, sit down and look at this kamla for five minutes.

– And that's it? – replied the boy arrogantly.

– Yes! – the old man nodded easily. – Set your alarm and start watching it.

– HA! We'll see who eats crow!

Saosh took up his cell phone, which, being unnecessary, was switched off not to discharge the battery. He set the alarm, which had to make a signal in five minutes and set about "watching the kamla".

At first, his gaze was chained to the object tenaciously. There were no outside thoughts. Then a quick thought crept into his mind:

"Hmm! Yes, it's very easy! What's wrong with that? Keep on watching!" But Saosh drove it away by the force of his will. Then other thoughts began to whisper over his ear. "What a beautiful lizard is made on the handle!.. What is it made of? ... What a powerful kamla!.. How many ceremonies it has seen... I was not even born, when it might have appeared... I wonder, will I have the same?..."

So gradually, the wind of thoughts began to intensify, completely changing his direction and blowing the other way round. "Oh, my left foot is becoming so badly numb! – he continued his mental pirouettes. – I must have placed myself badly. I've got formication on my foot. I'll sit more comfortably. So, got it. Seems better... When will this torture by watching finally come to an end?.. Are we going to have dinner?.. For some reason, my alarm clock doesn't ring for a long time... – his thoughts began to "visit him frequently", and then completely broke away and rushed into a gallop. – The battery might have discharged. When did I charge it? Ah, I remember, 20 days ago. God forbid it will discharge. I have to buy a new phone. The iPhone 7 has already been released, but I still use the fifth. TOTAL CRAP! What will boys tell about me?... And my mother has a loan for the fridge – she certainly won't give me money... They'd better sell their "Volga". What do they need it for?... I wonder if there is a connection with the Internet here. No, of course, there isn't. And if I climbed to the top? Depends on the weather and the place of satellites. Why do we live in such a crap? It's high time to create such signal communication, that will be able to catch everywhere at any place on the Earth. We prepare the flight to Mars, without having proper signal communication on our planet..."

And so his thoughts flew far, far away from the point with which they started their flight. When finally the long-awaited signal of the alarm clock sounded, Saosh suddenly jumped, as if coming around.

– Well? Have you managed to watch the kamla?

Saosh surprisingly looked at Kam and with the tail between legs squeezed out:

– I ... flew away!

– Congratulations, - laughed the old man.

– But what is funny here?

– Nothing – Kudai Kam gave a careless wave of his hand.

– And what am I supposed to do now?

– You should see the powers that control you and realize with which identity you are associated. For each power controls its identity. And to defeat them, you should be able to get away from these powers: from hunger, sex, laziness and other desires built-in you by nature, keeping you in slavery.

– And does it mean I shouldn't eat when I'm hungry? Or shouldn't I drink when I'm thirsty? But I'll die then, Kudai Kam?! – there was disappointment in Saosh's voice.

– Of course, you can't do without food, – answered Kudai Kam. – But you should realize this power that makes you take action. And then decide to wait, say, half an hour, and eat only then or eat little and finish later. Notto eat everything at once, but piece by piece. To put it shortly, by all means, try not to indulge those desires and separate from them so they lose control over you.

– Well, I'll try, – said the young man willingly.

– That's everything I had to tell you... For now... You have to start practising all this. So now, we are going to part.

– Oh-Oh-Oh! You don't say so! – Saosh exclaimed with disappointment.

– It's not for long. I need to finish some of my errands and complete the final preparations.

– For what, Kudai Kam?

– That's not your business. You must go home now, and we will meet with you again when the time comes. You will tell everything you have achieved.

– Here? Shall we meet here? Shall I come here?

– No, – Kam replied grimly. – You will come where the spirits will say.

– But where? – Saosh threw up his hands in complete perplexity.

– You already know how to look for me. The spirits will show you the way. I can only say that our meeting won't take place here. It will be abroad.

– But where?

– To the south. To the south of the place where we are now.

– Really? – Saosh paused thoughtfully. – I suppose I've understood – his face beamed with a happy smile.

– You can pass some part of the way by transport. Then the spirits will show you the road. When nature takes off its colourful dress, you will come to my place at the time of falling leaves.

– Ok. I got it. Of course, I’m very sorry to leave you, Kudai Kam, but... The shaman raised his hand in a warning gesture. And the young man realized that the conversation was over. Further conversations were meaningless.

He stood up, bowed respectfully, took his things and came out of the cave without turning to Kam with his back. Their meeting was over.

Time Apart

Saosh returned home. His parents greeted him warmly and with love. His father hugged him and patted him on the shoulder. Then he stepped back, looked at him attentively, as if evaluating his condition, and laconically said:

– GROWN-UP!.. You’ve grown up, my boy.

He didn’t ask him anything. For he knew that it was forbidden. Old traditions were still alive among the people. They treated shamans with respect, esteem and even fear. Everyone knew he could reap a harvest of trouble because of his curiosity.

Mother embraced Saosh warmly and led him to the table, treating him to his favourite dishes. Such as a homemade Kahn sausage, Kocho soup, Chegen, Borsonok baked balls, and cakes with honey. And, of course, his favourite tea, made from oregano and other herbs of the Altai.

Again Saosh found himself in a familiar precious parental environment. And suddenly, he clearly understood that the son's role turned on. He wondered how quickly he could switch parts: the part of the apprentice turned off, the part of the son turned on. He started watching it. He remembered everything Kudai Kam had taught him and started to practice. He made a lot of very interesting insights. Some surprised him, and others cheered him, the third completely shocked. Oddly enough, the shock and surprise prevailed. As if for the first time, Saosh looked at himself from the outside and saw himself as real: without trimming, hypocrisy and lies. And all this scared him. But more on that later. Later...

Less than a month passed, and our hero started to feel the call of the spirits. It was as if some great unknown Power started to pull him up powerfully and mightily. He became restless. Forgot what the rest was. His energy was almost sloping over. And everything the young shaman could think of was the road. GO, GO!!!

He began to collect his things. Homuz, magic items, a drum and others. Everything he could put in his backpack. He tied his drum onto the top of

his backpack. His parents only looked at each other leerily but didn't ask him anything. His mother was only walking and sighing sadly the whole day. But she was afraid to ask questions – she knew Kudai Kam heard them and knew everything, and he wouldn't like such curiosity. Moreover, brought up in old traditions, Saosh's parents knew that with their too strong attachment and desire to keep the son, they could do him only worse. And bring down the anger of spirits on themselves. In the form of various diseases and troubles. So they treated the upcoming parting with their son calmly and even philosophically.

– The shorter the parting, the less tears – said Saosh dryly, standing on the threshold of the family house.

– Time to go? – asked his father leerily, patting him on the shoulder.

– It's time! It's time!

His father gave him a strong hug and said:

– Good luck, son. Have a safe trip! Let the spirits be kind to you.

– Thank you, father – Saosh was a little embarrassed. With all his boyish being, he tried to break free from the parental care and become self-reliant. Alas, nature demanded it from him.

– Be strong, my son – his mother hugged him. – Don't put shame on our blood! – she stepped back and looked into his eyes attentively. – I'm proud of you.

– Thank you, mother, – he replied, blushing a little. – I will definitely be back. As soon as I am a shaman ...

– Slow down, son. Let everything be in its time. Everything has its time. And we will be waiting. You are our boy.

Saosh gently hugged his mother. He felt her immense power pouring into him and giving him a great impulse. The incentive to live, improve, develop and grow. He was very grateful to her for this. As well as to his father for his moral support.

But no matter how good it was with his parents, it was time for him to go. He took his backpack, looked at his parents again before leaving, and without looking back, left the house and got underway.

A beautiful Foreign Land

Having spent a couple of days on the way and have made several changes, Saosh arrived in another country. In half an hour of going by bus, he was on the outskirts of the town. He looked around. He was surrounded by endless plains, barely covered with trees in some places. Strictly speaking, it was even difficult to call them trees. Undersized, tiny, in some places, they even had an unusual gnarled sinuous shape. When looking at them, Saosh thought, there wasn't enough water for them. That is why they were so

tiny. But mostly, of course, plains surrounded him.

Another Ayami lived there. A proud, willful, indomitable and even unpredictable beauty. Rosy-cheeked, with two long, below the belt, thick braids and a piercing glance of burning black eyes. Dressed in the national costume and headdress. Decorated with beautiful national ornaments, she was just the incarnation of that place. That beautiful woman, the keeper of that place, at any time could abruptly change her mood. The morning gentle, friendly sun could be easily changed to the evening very severe wind. Clear calmness could suddenly change to bad weather. And vice versa: if a carrying away wind was blowing at dawn, clear windless weather set in before the sunset. And nobody could ever predict how the beautiful Ayami would behave. The weather forecasts there were more of a guesswork. Good, if guessed. If not – what can be done? That was the nature in that place!

– Where shall I go in this steppe? – Saosh asked himself in surprise, looking at this endless steppe. – I have never even been here! The task you gave me, Kudai Kam – he took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped off the sweat that oozed out because of the emotional stress. And being lost in reverie, he somehow awkwardly dropped it.

And at the same moment, as if hearing him, wind-the-tease picked up his handkerchief and carried it away. It seemed as if the handkerchief became alive, “spread his wings,” and flew like a kite.

– Hey, wait! No, that wasn’t the agreement – Saosh rushed for the “fugitive”. – Where are you going?!

As if the wind wanted this. Having calmed down a little, it put the “loss” on the ground and waited for a little until the boy reached it. And when Saosh, bending under the weight of a large backpack, tried to take it... The handkerchief “came to life” again and, cheerfully teasing his master, kept flying.

– Wait, wait!.. Stop! – losing his patience, cried the boy. – Are you deliberately teasing me? I say, stop!

The handkerchief acted accordingly. Having flown fully fifty meters, it stopped again, as if waiting for its owner.

– I’ll show you what is what! – Saosh was running, puffing. – I’ll show you how to get away from me! You, piece of cloth.

The handkerchief seemed to have heard these words, thought for a moment, then got offended but did not show it.

For the third time very carefully, tiptoeing, Saosh came up to his loss and

...

– Oh, no! OH, NO! – he cried in despair, watching the fugitive take the air. – Enough is enough. Are you deliberately testing me? What do you want from me? Shall I leave you here? – and at that very moment, an idea came to him. – I got it! GOT IT! You are showing me the way – he leaned

down and carefully picked up the loss. – Thank you very much, my dear handkerchief! – the handkerchief was lying on his palm as if smiling to him. – Thank you, spirits, for showing me the right direction! How could I forget about you? I did not understand that it was your hint. Thank you for your help, thank you!

And he continued to move in the direction shown by the spirits. Using other hints as well, he was at a beautiful and very unusual place by the evening. There were hills, bald peaks and even mountains covered with mixed forest, around. A green oasis in the middle of the endless vast steppes. There were both birches and aspens and larches and pines there. There were also all sorts of bushes. There was Juneberry, raspberry, currant, briar and everything he used to see since his childhood. Looking closer at them, Saosh understood that they were a little smaller than in his native country. Everything was tiny and, at the same time, beautiful here. Both trees with not very spreading branches. And copses, separated from each other by the fields. And blue-eyed lakes, freely spread out between not very high mountains and hills, reflecting on their surfaces the stunning riot of autumn colours. And rivers, running on the surface of mother-earth like blue veins. And streams that feed them. Everything was nice, cosy, small and at the same time stunningly beautiful.

At some point, walking along a quite high hill covered with forest, Saosh saw something strange. Stones could be seen from the general crustal rock. Like a layered cake or rather pieces of cake, left from the unbridled feast of giants, here and there, they were seen behind the trunks of pine trees.

– And it is clear why there are rock formations here – Saosh was talking quietly to himself. – Here long ago, many million years ago, lava used to break through the crust surface and pour down in layers. Then it solidified in such exotic “cakes”. It’s clear even to a schoolboy. It’s everything clear with it... STOP!..

What’s that? – the youth stopped in astonishment, looking at the rocks. – And where could this come from?

His eyes met something strange. There were roundish dents in the stones in almost every layer.

– They look like hollows in cheese – he laughed. – But wait, wait! Where could these hollows come from? It’s just incredible! How could they appear? What about other stones?

Saosh came to a huge heap higher than him. Hollows were here also almost in each layer. He ran his arm over it. It was rough to the touch. But its shape was very harmonious, without sharp angles and brows.

– Wow!.. But... Only WATER could create this?!.. BUT HOW? How could water appear at such a height? It’s just incredible.

He put his backpack on the ground, sat beside the mass of rock and wearily wiped the sweat from his forehead. Unable to believe it, he pulled out his

jew's-harp and started playing to soothe his inflamed mind. The mind, which is not for anything, wanted to cope with this task. "Water in the mountains?! It's too much!" – he thought, listening to the sounds of his devoted assistant – the jew's-harp. Modulating enchanting sounds filled all the space around, and the mind of the young shaman swam after them, trying to solve this great mystery. After a while, an extraordinary state of clear understanding, which he hadn't known earlier, condescended to him. Suddenly with distinct clarity, he realized, understood, and felt with all his being that the place was once ... THE BOTTOM OF THE LARGE OCEAN! – DEAR ME! – he exclaimed in surprise, nearly dropping the jew's-harp from his hands. – It was the ocean. It was the ocean! That's where I'm now! I've never seen anything like this in my life. What a surprise! Thank you, Kudai Kam, for inviting me to such a place! I like it so much here! It's just fantastic!

He climbed the highest mountain and took a deep breath of fresh air filled with the smell of ozone from autumn leaves. And then, from there, he started looking at the surroundings. A spectacular panorama burst upon his eyes. Around, decorated with colourful autumn forest, the nearby mountains ascended. Numerous blue-eyed lakes, large, smaller and very small, lying between the mountains, reflected in their bottomless depth both the blue sky and gold leaves and the high, proud peaks of the mountains. The hawks, spreading their wings, were circling about this magnificence. There was a beautiful landscape, which in its light blueness combined endless, covered with forests, hills and a blue sky. The horizon seemed to be missing. Although, of course, it could be seen in the pattern of distant hills.

Saosh was admiring the majestic beauty. There was calmness, harmony and peace in nature. The equinox was coming. All life was quietly coming to a standstill in a long-term aspiration of slowly but surely approaching winter. The birds stopped singing. Many of them were ready to fly to the southern skies. Here and there, their flocks "were training" before their most important flight. In such moments most of all, Saosh wanted to snuggle up with peace, silence and greatness for good. To disappear forever...

But, as it usually happens, he was distracted from that state by accidental, at first glance, impression.

He shifted his glance at smoke rising from a fire. It was rising in the autumn calm with the thin, barely visible blue-grey plume and dissolving into the blue sky.

"I wonder – Saosh thought – who could that be? At this time? ". He started thinking intently over this problem when an idea suddenly struck him.

– That's Kudai Kam! – he slapped his forehead. – I should have known it! What a blockhead I am! – at the same moment, a familiar, very clear, and plain feeling filled his whole being. As if Kam were together with him right on top of the mountain. – Yes, that's him! – jumped Saosh with joy.

– He is calling me! It's time. It's time to go! I've already come! I'm almost there.

And after thanking the beautiful mountain, he shouldered his backpack and began to go down slowly. Most of all, he was afraid to step on one of the cones. He remembered since his childhood what could happen after stepping on them. Don't you know? – the cone treacherously rolls under your foot, and you go together with it. And quite far. And funny. So he walked carefully, slowly, watching his step. And in a few hours of good speed, he was already at the place, shown by the spirits.

After a while, Saosh Yant just rushed into the tent of Kudai Kam and exclaimed ardently:

– I've realized that I am a slave of my own desires! They are attacking me from all sides, and I behave like a stupid puppet!

The old man looked at him attentively without saying a word.

– I tried to work with hunger – Saosh continued impetuously – and at that very moment, my body and head started aching, and laziness appeared. I wanted to do nothing. I always wanted to find excuses for my inactivity and keep on doing nothing. And sexual desires – it's just trouble! Just hardcore stuff! Pessimism, loss of meaning of life, and reluctance to live began to appear when I tried to get all that under control. These desires appeared like a jack in the box! I'm serious.

Kudai Kam only grinned, looking at the young man.

– And sometimes – he continued – irritation, anger, thoughts like “why do I have to do all these practices?” and all of that kind appeared.

– That's it. So, the work has begun, – said Kudai Kam expressively. – You have to understand: that all these desires come from the outside. Some – from the forces of nature, others – from evil spirits. They provoke you to begin to experience some emotions and feelings. And not always are these emotions positive. Some even involve suffering. They provoke you and then feed on the energy that you emit during experiencing the emotions.

– But what shall I do? – almost in anger, cried Saosh.

– The main thing here is to keep calm and displace these influences. Remember: they are not yours. They come from the outside. Just watch them calmly and increase the distance between you and them. Simultaneously, open your heart to Tengri and ask him to help you in your work. If it is open enough to God, you will feel grace. You can spend it on these desires. To transform and change them with the condescending light of the Divine, with its calmness.

Saosh thought for a while and kept silent as if pondering over what he had heard.

– And can the awakening happen without such stress? – he asked after a

while.

– You need friction to light a fire. The same is here, – replied Kudai Kam, – effort and strain don't allow you to sleep. And if everything is calm, the person quickly falls asleep, thinking he is “developing”. But this is another deception, a new illusion. A cunning ploy to catch a person in the fetters of sleep again.

– But what shall I begin with?

– With something simple. For example, you are breathing. Saosh nodded.

– Now try to exhale and hold your breath. Hold your breath as long as you can.

Saosh took a few breaths, then exhaled all the air from his lungs and held his breath. He started listening to his feelings. At first, it was quite comfortable for him.

In a short while, discomfort began to increase. Then it turned into an unbearable feeling. With all his strength, Saosh held his nose and mouth with his hands and strained himself. His face turned red. The sweat appeared on his skin and... He broke down and took a deep breath.

– Phew! It's so difficult! – he exclaimed excitedly. – That's the slavery I'm in!

– Not only you. All living beings on earth.

– But what shall I do?! – Saosh barely levelled his breath.

– Watch yourself and direct the flow of God Tengri's Divine light onto all your desires. Pray to him.

– Shall I do it every time?

– Of course! But you should know one more very important thing.

– What kind of thing?

– That desires are also different.

– In what way?

– Some desires belong to a natural necessity. You won't survive without them. But don't idealize them since a lot of people make a religion of their desires.

– Ah! It's about food or sex? – guessed Saosh.

– Yes. You have to be moderate and abstemious in these desires. You can't do completely without them. If you don't eat, sooner or later, you will die. You can't do without drink or sleep. It's ok. Just be moderate.

– And what else?

– There are desires that appear from the lower spirits. They are especially dangerous to people.

– What kind of desires are these?

– For example, a person wants to throw himself in front of a train or jump off the roof.

– Ah, I think I got it! – exclaimed the young man.

– Exactly! – nodded Kam. – Or suddenly, he starts to quarrel with everyone

who surrounds him. Especially with the closest ones.

– Yes, yes, I know! My grandmother sometimes behaved like that.

– All this is from the evil spirits that come to a person, take possession of him, and he does their bidding. This is both the desire to spite someone stupid stubbornness and masochistic fancies. Simply everything is there!

– And is it because of the evil spirits?

– Of course! It's not the person who created this! He would be scared to do it.

– But it's not scary with the spirits? – laughed Saosh. – It's even funny and interesting.

– True, – Kam nodded. – A person can even die of this “fun”.

– But what can be done?

– I have already said – ask the Gods for help. Ask Tengri to condescend and throw his light on all desires. Only in such a way, trusting in the mercy of the Higher Powers, a person can get rid of this filth.

– And why do we not remember that we were Tengri? – Saosh Yant asked.

– Yes, a man does not remember much even from his current life: he does not remember dreams, he remembers his childhood dimly. He can hardly even remember what happened yesterday. This is because he is sleeping, that is, he has his head in the clouds all the time. He is inattentive to the present moment. And one needs special training to wake up. Then we can remember everything better, including the fact that we were Tengri.

“Why do we need this dream? Why are we in this state?”

“There is a reason for that too. Incarnating on the Earth, we have to play a certain role, as in a theatre. Everyone is given his role and his mission in advance. And not even one role, but several roles: one role in the family, another – in social activities, the third one -at work, the fourth one – among friends, etc. So. To play all these roles well, he must forget that he was Tengri, that there were other lives, that there was life in the dream world between physical incarnations. Otherwise, he will do everything not from the current role but from his memory that he is Tengri.

But then this will not be the same: he will, like Christ, go and say that he is the son of God. It will be difficult to play other roles that have befallen him in this life. He cannot be complete in them. For the same purpose, embodied beings do not know the future, although it is predetermined in many ways. Otherwise, a person will not be able to dream, fear, imagine, hope, believe, etc. After all, most of a man's life passes in his thoughts, assumptions, theories, and dreams – and all this would not have happened if he had known the past or the future. And this is a valuable layer of impressions arising from this ignorance, which he then will be fed at the feast of Tengri. Without this, man would no longer be man but God. And so that a person can adapt better to an earthly difficult life, he is born a baby who is flexible, open, receptive and can easily adapt to any

conditions. But he dies as an ossified old man whose life experience no longer allows him to learn something new, take a different look at this life, or change something in him.

And although a man perceives himself as what he is at the moment, Tengri sees him entirely – what was in the distant past and what he will become in the future. And, of course, Tengri sees him as one of the Tengerins, that is, as a part of itself, as a spirit. And a person, to gain completeness, must see himself in the same way and not focus on those scenes that he plays in a given period of his life. Now you know the secret of this life. But remember: hearing does not mean understanding it with the entire mass, with the entire being. You are sleeping, you will forget everything again in a minute, and you will consider yourself one of the mask roles. To understand this, you need to wake up.

– Where does evil come from in this world? – Saosh Yant asked.

– Evil comes from the disunity of all creatures. They feel separated from each other – this is how the ego appears. In the highest heavens, what one feels – the other also feels. And here, people inflict pain and suffering on each other and don't feel it and, even worse, rejoice at the suffering of another, fueled by fear and torment of the victim. Because of these laws of the physical world, people are ignorant: one does not know what the other thinks.

– Another man's mind is a closed book. There is nothing like this in the upper heavens. What one thinks – everyone knows there, so there is no lie, no deception. Everything is known: past and future. A person can communicate with higher spirits. And here, a person doesn't even hear if the spirits are trying to say something to him. It seems to him that he started seeing things. In addition, it is very difficult here since the soul must spiritualize the dead matter of the physical body, which is sometimes sick, ageing, or torturing the soul with its needs. And the worst thing is that to survive, creatures must eat each other's bodies. After all, even plants are also living things. All these factors also give rise to wars between people, slavery and other ugly forms of existence on Earth. And only love between everyone who exists can change something. People should and can learn to love each other, cultivating exhaled emotions instead of anger, hatred, resentment, greed, etc.

Saosh thoughtfully listened to Kam without interrupting.

– You must be tired after your trip, I suppose? – asked Kudai Kam gently.

– I haven't noticed, really.

– Come on, go to bed. And try not to fall asleep as long as possible.

– No problem! – exclaimed the young man. – My mother doesn't sleep half a night.

– You are not your mother. You're still young. You've got your own biological clock ticking. So go to bed and resist sleep.

Saosh lay down on the bed, covered himself with the buckskin blanket, and the sweet feeling of pleasant fatigue immediately seized all his being. He stretched himself sweetly and yawned but then remembered that he couldn't fall asleep. He struck his legs out of the blanket so that the evening coolness allowed him not to fall asleep.

– How sly and nimble you are! – snickered Kudai Kam in his moustache. – Hide your legs, boy. Don't cheat – I'm watching you!

Saosh fully covered himself with the blanket and started fighting intensely with the sleep. A couple of times, he fell into the unsteady haze of sleep and immediately fell out of it. But soon, deep and heavy young sleep overcame him.

The Dream about Poplars

And he was dreaming of a very interesting, unusual place. He had never been there before. But the feeling emanating from that place, was pleasant and warm. Saosh looked around and saw the place where seventy rivers flew together. Their rapid babbling flow, merging into a united chorus, ran further along the valley among seventy large mountain-fortresses. There was a huge eternal poplar with a hundred trunks in this valley. Lit up by the rays of the Moon and the Sun, shining like gold, it stood in solitude, living life known only to it. Silver leaves were falling with a soft rustle from its branches bending to the moon side. From its branches, bending to the sun side, golden leaves were falling. The earth beneath this poplar was covered with the postcard-beautiful silver and golden carpet. The whole space was filled with an ethereal light, peace, harmony and joy. Birds were chirping in the sky. Cheerful laughter and babbling of birds could be heard everywhere. The most beautiful melody of the harmony of life was in the air. Filling the space around, it gave strength, faith and hope for a happy future.

The poplar was so large that a hundred mares could stand under one branch. Forty sheep could easily hide under another branch. Two identical golden cuckoos of a horse's head size sat echoing on top of that eternal seven-layered poplar. Saosh looked at them more attentively and immediately realized that those unusual birds knew everything. He understood that the golden cuckoos were sitting there for some reason. It turned out that they foretold the future to any traveller who appeared there.

– Dear cuckoos, – said Saosh, – can you tell me what is in store for me in the future?

One of them turned its head to him, looked at him attentively and then said:

– Your fate will be not easy but esteemed. Difficult but honourable. You are

destined to be the Great Shaman, boy.

The other also turned its head to him and echoed the first one:

– You have a great patron. Obey him in everything and serve only him. Then you'll be fine.

– Thank you, dear, darling, sweet cuckoos – Saosh gave them a bow to the ground.

– Don't thank us. Thank your destiny and God Tengri.

– And do you serve him?

– Yes. And since he is the God of the Future, we know all about the future.

– And will I have a long life, dear?

– Yes. You will – they answered. – But you should think not about it.

– And what about?

– How to live your life decently with a lot of kind and good deeds. To give people a lot of useful and necessary knowledge. And to give your Power to a decent successor at the end of your life. That's what you should think about. Don't worry about the rest – it isn't worth it.

– Thank you, dear. You've made me happy – Saosh gave them a bow again. Meanwhile, the cuckoos turned away from him and began to look into the future again. He understood. He shouldn't bother them any longer. After all, he asked for everything he wanted.

He cast his eyes down, took a closer look and saw gentle, delicate, subtle poplar wool falling from it. And under each fluff, there were small embryos of children and animals. As if future children, animals, birds and all life on earth were parachuting to earth. And at the same moment, Saosh understood that God Tengri sent embryos of people's souls, and cattle end everything alive on the Earth in that way.

Saosh lowered his eyes, and saw those fluffs with embryos going to get animals and a woman in labour.

"So this is how it happens! – thought Saosh in surprise. – The difference between living beings and inanimate things is that living beings have souls. And Tengri gives souls to all living beings on Earth. Isn't it a miracle? Isn't it a mystery?!!".

He looked afar and saw copulating animals a little distance from the poplar. Saw a husband and a wife embracing each other.

– I'm sorry, – blushed the boy. – I didn't mean to do it. I'm sorry! – and he bashfully lowered his gaze.

And at the same moment, the earth seemed to open in front of him, and he saw the iron poplar without branches. In an instant, everything disappeared. The Sun and the Moon went out. The music, the sounds of joy and cheerful laughter disappeared somewhere, and Saosh felt like plunging into some dark, silent, oppressive space. There was a very heavy, oppressive state, which seemed not to let anyone go. And Saosh felt as if that state were almost engulfing him, and he couldn't escape. He looked at that strange

tree, and he suddenly understood that Erlick's poplar was in front of him. It stood on the yellow island in the middle of the yellow river. There was a hell hole with seven hungry, insatiable mouths in the middle of the yellow island. That awesome iron poplar without branches had grown from that hell hole with seven mouths. It gleamed darkly in the middle of the muddy yellow river, carrying its white waters past him. Anguish, despair and hopelessness emanated from that place. And he wanted to run away from there as quickly as possible. Saosh wanted to take his eyes off the poplar, but he looked down. And he saw that the lower end of the poplar was in the lowest world, and the upper one went through the upper third world. There was a white erdine (the treasure, the source of life), which could raise the dead and heal the passed away.

Saosh wanted to get a better look at everything he saw, but some unseen Power picked him up and carried him into higher realms. He frantically stared at the erdine, but after a few moments, the vision was gone, and he opened his eyes.

He was back in the cave. Kudai Kam was sitting next to him, playing the drums.

– Where am I? What is going on? – asked Saosh, half asleep. – Where is the erdine? Why has the dream gone?

– So many questions... – Kudai Kam kindly looked at him.

– What was the vision?

– You saw the poplars, my friend. The time came for you to see them.

– Did you wake me up purposefully?

– Sure.

– BUT WHY?!!! – resented the young shaman.

– Because you're too young to know such things, everything has its time. Its time.

– And when will this time come?

– When you become stronger and feel good in the spirit world.

– And what will be then?

– You will be able not to lose yourself in Erlick's world, learn how to behave, and you will use this erdine. You will be able to cure people with different diseases, protect them from death and return them to that world.

– Really?! – exclaimed Saosh. – Just like Christ.

– And why are you surprised? – chuckled the old man. – Christ was also one of us. Don't you remember?

– Well, yes. He raised Lazarus from the dead and used to command the spirits... Wow!

– But don't rush the time. Don't be in a hurry. You should become stronger.

– And how long will it last?

– All right, enough about that. I told you: everything has its time – Kam's

voice sounded strict and cold.

And Saosh realized that the time for questioning was over.

– Get ready. We are going to the mountain with you.

– WOW! – the boy jumped with joy. – And how shall I get ready? I just have to belt myself!

They quickly ate their breakfast and got underway. The mountains there were not very high, compared to the Altai, but in their way, beautiful and mysterious. There was mainly pine forest around. Tiny, not large trees sometimes had very tortuous trunks. They grew up among the granite and made their way through almost impassable territory. Mastered the area in which it seemed nothing could grow. But it grew against all odds. For life doesn't care where it is allowed to be and where it isn't. It has never asked permission and waited for an invitation.

Granite, by the way, also had its own history and memory. It was... how to put it?.. Pitted. The rock, lying under the feet, crumbled into thousands of small pebbles. There, where animal or human trails could be met, the granite gravel lay under feet. Very small, but still gravel. The stones around also seemed to have crumbled. No sooner had they touched them with their hands than they could understand how fragile they were. There was a feeling in that place as if it were very unusual. Saosh had never seen it before. He had been in places where the granite rocks were covered with pine forest, but he had never had such a feeling anywhere.

They came up to a huge boulder, one of the great many in that place. The boulder was twice the height of a man. Saosh automatically came closer to it, and touched a rough, reddish granite surface. And his hand, following the curves of the stone, drowned in a rounded brow, somehow resembling an alcove. The surface was absolutely smooth and even. As if the most skillful architect had carved it in stone.

– Water – Kam's voice suddenly sounded behind his back.

– Excuse me? – replied Saosh.

– It was created by water. Your “architect” is water.

– But HOW? – Saosh continued to wonder.

– Very simple. Just earlier this place was the bottom of a large ocean. And mother-water tried to make these dents in these stones.

– But how? How did the mountains turn out to be at the bottom of the ocean?

– You see, – Kam patted him on the shoulder, – terra firma – it is also the waves on the body of our planet. Have you heard about Atlantis?

– Of course! You bet...

– So just as it went underwater, all continents and countries will eventually go to the bottom. And what is now the bottom of the sea, will come to surface and become the land. It is a continuous process. It has always been and it will always be.

– Yes. I’ve heard that the Himalayas are gradually growing, and Indonesia is in the process of formation of the crust. And the African continent may soon crack. Europe and St. Petersburg are gradually going underwater.

– Right. Because some parts of the land are cropping out, while others are going down. These are also huge waves, but on the surface of our mother-Earth.

– So, the history of this place is... – Saosh mused.

– Multimillion. Ok, let’s go further, – the old man patted the boy’s shoulder.

– I’ll show you something very interesting.

And they continued their ascent. In a couple of hours they were on the top of a high mountain. The view was breathtaking. There were ridges and mountains in all directions. Beautiful scenery of mountains and lakes spread out in between running to the horizon in the long blue view. The lakes were completely different. Large and small. Some of them were of a rich blue colour. Others – with a slight greenish colour. The third were completely dark blue. Each lake seemed to have not only its colour, but also the soul.

– Lakes are the Earth’s eyes, with which it looks into the Sky, – said the old man philosophically.

– Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, why are they so different? And it’s very strange, they are all almost round here. Why?

– Because earlier, when our earth was only shaping, the meteorites were constantly hitting it. They left these traces. Shamans say, that these were Tengri’s arrows, which reached his wife Umai.

– How cruel of him!

– Or rather, these were not arrows, but his... you know, I suppose, you can guess, you are not a child.

– You don’t say so?! Really? – Saosh burst out laughing and even blushed from embarrassment. – Don’t tell me.

– These meteorites were completely different in composition. That is why water in different lakes is different. Both colour and energy are different. Everything is different. In some lakes there is life-giving water, which raises the dead. In other lakes it is dead. You can’t even drink it. Everything is not for nothing, my friend.

– How interesting. Poor Umai! She looks at her sweetheart with her blue-eyed lakes, and he keeps silence.

– But why is he silent? Recently a meteorite has fallen in Chelyabinsk. Wasn’t that enough?

– It was really enough for us, especially for my friend, who lives in that area.

– So everything is ok with the Gods. They don’t forget about each other.

– And what shall we do then?

– We also shouldn’t forget about them. And remember: the human is

nothing without Gods!

– I agree.

They spent some more time admiring the beauty of that great place. Then they tore off the ribbons from their shirts and hung them on the lonely scrubby tree, growing nearby. Then they gave offerings to the Gods and had a ritual meal on the top of the mountain, thus becoming related to that place. They praised the Gods, as well as the spirit of the mountain. Asked for a safe return trip. And then they slowly, gradually started their way down. They began to retrace. They were in Kudai Kam's tent by the sunset.

– You will stay here for a few days, – said Kudai Kam gravely, looking into the fire. – And then we'll have to part.

– But why? – inadvertently resented the boy. – I don't want to part with you!

– We have to. I have to help some people here.

– What kind of people?

– You needn't know it. You will come to my place in time before the cover, of the last rains.

Saosh thought, and paused a little.

– Of course, it won't be here?.. – he suggested discreetly. The old man only nodded silently.

– Shall I learn from the spirits? As I've always done?

– Yes, that's right.

– Ok, as you say, Kudai Kam. And, as I take it, I will have to come not here, right?

– You already know everything. When the time comes, I will call you. And now go to bed. Tomorrow you'll have to go.

Saosh prepared to go to bed. And as soon as he laid down and covered himself with a buckskin blanket, he fell into a deep and sound youthful sleep.

He packed up quickly in the morning. Said goodbye to his teacher and started his way back. In a few days he was at home.

A New Trip of a Young Shaman

Life went on. Saosh helped his parents prepare for new challenges and remembered all the experience he had gained on his last trip. What changed in his life? Seemingly nothing. But internally, he made a real breakthrough! Really! It was a completely different state of mind and a feeling of his Being. Only now the boy began to feel as if he were alive and became more active even than in his childhood. His LIFE, VIGOUR and POWER was bubbling up!

But the most important thing was that he became aware of himself. He

started to see everything happening around him, everything guiding him. He began to understand the work of his unique and sophisticated machine. Unlike other people in a deep sleep, he had gleams of awareness. And they were becoming longer, deeper and more frequent. So gradually his soul was growing and becoming more mature, and he was just assisting it.

But at some point, the same familiar, mighty and imperious Power called him again. He couldn't mix that feeling with anything. It was drawing him like a magnet, and he knew it was time for him. Time to go.

His parents understood everything at once. Silently they looked at each other. His mother's eyes were filled with tears. His father embraced her and said:

– Don't cry. He is doing good work. He is growing up to be a man. He will be the Great Kam. And will help people. You should be happy.

– Yes, you're right. It's better for him to become a shaman, than to live in sin, as many young people do. Sniff up everything, lose themselves into drinking and do, I'm ashamed to say what...

– Good that you understand it. Let him go. Let him go and don't be sad. May his trip be safe.

Meanwhile, Saosh had already packed up his few belongings and came out to say goodbye to them.

– Mom, Dad, I have to go! – he smiled to them. – Do not be sad, I'll be back soon.

– May your trip be safe – his father shook his hand.

– Take care of yourself, son – his mother embraced him tenderly.

They embraced all together, standing for some time. Then they sat for a moment before the trip. For some time they were sitting like that in silence. And Saosh got underway. He walked without looking back. His parents wiped away the tears. His mother sent him a blow for a safe trip. And our hero started a new adventure.

In several days Saosh was at the Chuysky tract, in those places, where people were rare visitors. At first he did not even have to run to the spirits for help. His gut feeling, like the instinct of an animal, led and led him to the South. Until he was behind Chiketamansky pass and, being in out-of-the-way parts, reached the junction of two most beautiful rivers.

They joined with two bubbling streams. The first was the mainstream, stately and sedately discharging its light waters. Another one was the secondary, more rapid, bubbling and fast-moving stream. It was discharging its muddy bubbling waters, and falling into the main river, gradually losing its former power and dash. And abandoned itself to the general slow flow. And why should it be in a hurry? Since the river was flowing into the Eternity, and that meant, fuss and worries were meaningless.

Saosh could not help admiring this magnificent sight. It seemed to him, that together with that river he was thrusting himself into the ocean and was

almost ready to snuggle up with it.

But he failed. After a while the same imperious and demanding Power called him again. A sudden gust of wind came on, and the weather quickly changed. From nowhere clouds appeared on the cloudless blue sky.

– Dear wind, shall I go there? – asked Saosh. – If so, can you please, become stronger?

And the wind was not long in coming. It blew with such a force that Saosh decided to obey its instructions before it was too late. He walked a few hours along the gorge of the bubbling river, from the rise of which his trip had begun. Then a strange cry of a bird caught his attention. As if it were calling him. Saosh went there. The bird began to fly away, continuing to make its lingering and disturbing sounds. Not having noticed it, Saosh climbed up to a rather decent height. And at some point he looked around and saw amazing view. Below, freely extending in the gorge, a turbulent bubbling river flew. The wind had blown away the clouds, which had gathered, and the warm sun appeared again. Rivers of the stunning beauty were around the gorge. Their slender ranges were going into the far blue distance, creating the same unique Roerich's beauty. The blue sky shaded the severe and beautiful mountain peaks, covered with the first frost of gray hair. The leaves on the trees had already fallen. However, that didn't spoil the view.

On the contrary, it emphasized the strict and majestic beauty of the Altai. "Wow! Even at such a time it is so beautiful! – Saosh thought. – Even the dull greyness of the late autumn doesn't spoil it! How beautiful it is around!". He stood for a while, admiring the scenery, and then again went in the direction selected by the spirits. And in just a few minutes, he felt a painfully familiar feeling.

– Really? – he exclaimed happily.

He made a few steps up and suddenly he heard the sounds of the jew's-harp. A few more – and he saw the entrance to the cave, from which those sounds came. Believing and not believing himself, he ran into a cozy and warm room, created by nature itself.

In front of him Kudai Kam sat near the fire with his eyes closed, playing the jew's-harp. His face, cut with deep wrinkles, expressed peace, self-concentration and concentration. Saosh gently put his belongings at the entrance and then silently sat in front of the fire.

After some time the charming melody stopped. Kam opened his eyes and looked straight into the eyes of the young man.

– Welcome back! He said tenderly. – I've played a bit for your safe trip.

– And have you been playing long? – asked the young shaman without surprise.

– And what do you think?

– Probably, since I have been drawn here... – supposed the boy shyly.

– True! True, – chuckled Kam. – I have. Well, make yourself comfortable, make yourself at home. Soon we will start your further training.

Herbs of Power

- Can I ask you? The old man nodded silently.
- I’ve heard recently that the herbs of Power also brought people to the Spirit world – Saosh Yant asked curiously.
- Yes, you are right, but everything must be done sensibly.
- What do you mean?
- You see, – Kam raised his thumb up deliberately, – harmonization is very important here. If a person can’t bring himself to harmony, the spirit of the herb seizes his will and takes it away. And then it will carry him into the distant realms of the World of dreams, where he can get lost and even leave his soul there.
- You mean? – Saosh asked with fear. – HE CAN DIE?
- Not only.
- But what else?
- These spirits are very dangerous as they can steal the human spirit, enslaving him.
- Oh! And how will it become obvious? – Saosh was seriously warned.
- It’s quite simple. He will depend on the herbs of power and will give them his soul. They will “tease” him until they “drink” all his powers up to the end.
- And what will be then?
- You know yourself... – the old man looked at the boy expressively.
- Madness? – Saosh supposed shyly.
- Amongst other things.
- Withdrawals?
- Yes, sure.
- A-a-ah! And everything that happens with the common addicts will happen to that person? Addiction, withdrawals, desire to possess “his” at any cost. And as a result – depletion, degradation and a shameful death.

Kam nodded in harsh silence. Saosh thought a little and remembered his classmates, who were secretly adults, so no one saw, sniffed something up and smoked. At first, their eyes glittered, and they behaved inappropriately. Some became very active, while others became cotton-sluggish. But it was only the beginning. They started to attend school abruptly, and their parents were wanted at school. Mothers were in tears. Fathers were in anger. They couldn’t change anything in that situation. In despair, they tried to “lock” their children in the psychiatric hospital or the addiction clinic. Nothing changed the situation. Some of them had already passed

away. Others were going to. Slowly but surely digging a grave with the rig... But only several years passed since. And many of them were no longer alive.

“Just think! – Saosh was talking in his mind. – The same thing could happen to me! If I hadn’t met Kudai Kam,

I had the “opportunity” to follow their way. And I wouldn’t be here now!.. As if some unknown Power were taking care of me all that time!..”

– Hey?! Thinking? – asked the old man, soulfully looking at the boy. – Thinking!.. – As usual, he knew his thoughts. Unlike your friends, shamans live long productive lives. They are in good health and do a lot of good for people. Feel the difference?

– And how do shamans manage to avoid such a fate? – Saosh flitted from his reverie.

– Well, it beats all! How do you put it, you mix apples and oranges?

– Yes.

– These are completely different things. Naughtiness of stupid teenagers and serious shamanic practices. They can’t even be compared!

– Tell me, please.

– Ok, – the old man tousled his hair. – Listen. The thing is that in all ancient traditions herbs of Power were never used “just for fun” or for desipience. They were treated with esteem, respect and care, even with reverence and fear. They were taken only in special cases. And very, very rarely. Besides, the spirits of ancestors always help the shaman. They come to him during his trip to the subtle world. As well as the spirits of the dead shamans. And of course, Ayami – the spirits of places of Power. It’s them, who make him the shaman, pulling him into the Spirit world. Just imagine the Power behind a Kam! He becomes powerful! He can do everything.

– How complicated, – Saosh said thoughtfully.

– It is! – smiled Kam. – Also assistant spirits help him. Kam gathers all his spirits into the drum, when it begins to perform a ritual, and they become his power – the Elbe.

– The Elbe?.. What is it?

– The Elbe is the inner power of a shaman, which helps him in the spirit world. It guides him in this world. And the more spirits he has, the more powerful his Elbe is. The more powerful he becomes, the more he can do. Spirits guide him in their world, running his errands. So, to become strong and powerful, the shaman has to gather as many assistant spirits as possible. But the first thing he has to do is to get in contact with his patron spirit.

– And how can he do it?

– For this, he needs to visit the places of Power, where he should look for contact with Ayami. To come constantly to the ancient burial sites to find contact with ancestors, who may become his patrons. And when he finds his patron in Ayami or a powerful ancestor, they will give him Then But –

the spirit of shamanic ecstasy, which will take him out to the Spirit World.

– And will I also have the same? – asked Saosh anxiously and enthusiastically.

– Of course, you will in your time. You need time.

– Ah -ah-ah, – Saosh said vaguely and started to think.

– But it's very difficult to do it for an ordinary person without an assistance of a real shaman, – continued Kam.

– And how can I get it? – asked the would-be shaman with hope in his voice.

– I asked you to come here for some reason, – said Kudai Kam solemnly. – The spirits showed this cave to me, and then brought you here.

– Yes, I feel it, but I can't explain it sensibly, – Saosh felt great mighty Power, emanating from somewhere below. He felt, as if enormous power, the nature of which he could neither understand, nor explain, were rising to him from the centre of the earth. – What's happening, Kudai Kam?

– The thing is, that there is a sacred burial of the great ancient shaman Kairakan in this cave. He's very powerful and mighty.

– And who is he? What makes him powerful?

– He is the ancient ancestor of my family. Everyone was afraid of him during his lifetime. For he was so powerful that just the mention of his name without proper respect could bring trouble to the person, who had mentioned it. Even other Altai shamans were afraid of him. And even after his death, there was a storm for a long time, it thundered, the wind wrested the trees with their roots. It was pouring rain for several days.

– Excuse me, won't we disturb him?

– No. Since you're under my care. Do everything I tell you and everything will be fine. We are here to get his patronage and protection. Here, take the drum and we'll start performing a ritual. We'll be asking him for Tyn Bur for you.

Saosh Yant carefully and reverently took the drum in his hands. He stood, waiting for further instructions of his older mentor. The fire was burning down. And it was quite dark. Only embers, gleaming with the fading flames, lit the arches of the cave with the mysterious glimmering. Kudai Kam explained to Saosh Yant how to enter the state of trance, playing the drums.

– Here, take this headwear – he handed Sasha headwear with droppers. – Put it on your head... Ready? Good, – Kudai Kam set his headwear so that the droppers closed the boy's eyes. He wanted to set it, and move it on to the back of his head, when he immediately heard an imperious command. – No! Don't touch it. Everything is done properly. These droppers cover your face for a reason. During the ritual they will help you turn away from the outside world and turn in upon yourself. Get into the spirit world.

Saosh closed his eyes a little and felt that it was really convenient. Everything was thought out to the last detail.

– Ok. Now, take the drum in your left hand, and the kamla – in the right. Can you see the drawing on the inside of the drum?

– Yes! – Saosh started watching it with acute fascination. – What is it? It's a shamanic mandala.

– True. This is a map of the shaman's world. It will help you during your trip in the spirit world. Now get your face down into the drum, as if you wanted to "dive" into it. And listen to it attentively. Snuggle up with the sounds. And I will help you. I will guide you.

Meeting with the Ancestor Spirit

The old man took his jew's harp and began setting the rhythm. Singing loud sounds reverberated from the walls with resounding modulations, creating completely unreal beauty. Hardly had one sound fade and ceased, then another started to sound, followed by the next sound. Endless modulating echo intensified and combined these sounds into a polyphonic choir. Taking on the rhythm, Saosh Yant started to accompany it on his drum, beating it with kamla in time with the sounds of the jew's harp. The arches of the cave, reverberating those sounds with a booming echo, seemed to become alive and to be dancing in tune. And the entire atmosphere of the cave seemed to become alive, and started talking with Saosh Yant.

Saosh began to enter the state of trance. As if everything happening around, gained a new sound, depth and a completely new meaning. He had never had such an experience before. The feeling that something great and important had to happen at that moment, more and more started to fill all his being. It was similar to the sea waves, which are coming closer and closer to the shore, at the end of their way raised their crests and sougling combed the seaboard rocks. The wave kept on growing and becoming more powerful in him... It was coming closer and closer... It was raising its crest and...

Suddenly he thought he heard heavy footsteps approaching from somewhere afar. Closer, closer and closer... They were approaching the boy, and he was waiting with his heart aflutter. "And what will happen next?". They were closer... So close, that he could almost feel the presence of someone, whose face he still couldn't see... And... In the darkness he saw a huge shadow figure of a man, dressed in the ceremonial shamanic garment. The boy even stopped breathing. He couldn't believe his eyes! And immediately he started to throw a cursory glance at the figure automatically. The figure was wearing a headwear, crowned with a majestic head of an eagle owl. The sides of which were decorated with large wings. The boy's

glance swept down. He started to look at the shamanic garment. The caftan consisted of many colored cords that hung down to the ground. A few dozens of bells hanging throughout the garment, created a funny jingle with every movement of the shaman. Metal pendants, each of which had its own meaning, purpose, created an ensemble on that special garment. Saosh looked at it fascinated.

Suddenly, the figure of the shaman came up closer to the boy. From the darkness, he could see his strong-willed, Mongoloid face with large piercing eyes. He was looking at Saosh Yant attentively as if piercing him with his eyes. Saosh had shivers running up his spine because of that glance.

– I know why you are here, – the Shaman said in a deep, otherworldly voice.

– You have to have my dedication.

Saosh listened carefully, without saying a word. He was just stunned by everything that was going on.

– I brought you a steed, – continued the Shaman.

And he clapped his hands. At the same moment the space around trembled, and Saosh Yant heard the approaching sound of hooves. It was barely audible afar. Then it began to intensify, to increase, becoming closer and closer. Saosh had a feeling as if something very familiar and very strong were approaching him. He listened to the sounds and felt his heart beating stronger and stronger. The sound became even stronger and was just steps from him. And at the same moment he saw a huge red horse. Its big brown watery eyes looked with devotion and at the same time with some cheerful light. As if it welcomed Saosh and invited him to run together.

– Hello! Hello, my friend! – Saosh gently patted his new friend on its neck. At the same moment the horse started, happily stroke its hoof and began to run around him. The young man watched it silently, waiting for what would happen next. Meanwhile, the horse “stretched” itself very much, having encircled Saosh Yant. Fascinated, the young shaman was watching it. The horse nickered and turned into a whirlwind, that the very second circled around Saosh Yant, picked him up and carried to heaven. He wasn’t afraid at all. On the contrary, his state was joyful and elated. “Wow – he through.

– Oh, my!”. And the next moment Saosh Yant felt that he was sitting on a fiery steed and riding it in some mysterious world.

Trees were watching him. Each of them had its own peculiar face. They were watching calmly and friendly. The faces were wise and majestic. As if being over the everyday bustle, they lived their own unique lives. Framed with “hair” of the branches, adorned with their leaves, with kind, calm and wise eyes, they welcomed the young man.

– Hey-hey-hey! Good day, my dear! – he waved them hello. – Time will come and I’ll hug each of you. See you later. We’ll have a talk, my dear!

Involuntarily he looked down and saw that everything around was alive. And everything around had its own face. Stones, rocks, the lake they were

passing by, had faces. The faces of stones somehow resembled dwarfs. Kind and hardworking and at the same time mysterious. Rocks had strict, elongated, willed faces. They were watching in such a way, that involuntarily he wanted to stand at rigid attention and begin to “snap a salute”. The lake, by contrast, had very deep bottomless blue eyes. It was giving calmness and peace, like a loving devoted wife. He wanted to dive into them and keep on watching till self-abandonment. To snuggle up with their coolness and silence.

Saosh looked around and suddenly realized that everything around was alive and seemed to be talking to him. He felt that every object wanted to talk to him. Every tree, every stone, every roadside blade. Wanted but could not express it in words. But it wasn't necessary at all. He could understand them in that way. He understood and knew what they were telling him. And he also answered them without words. It was just an incredible state, which he had never experienced before.

But the horse began to decrease gradually. Saosh felt that they were returning to earth. Wonderful visions had gone somewhere, and he plunged into some shaky haze, like clouds. Like thick fog. But soon, it was gone as well, and again they were in the cave. Saosh Yant saw that again he was standing at the same place, and in front of him was the red horse – his faithful friend and assistant, faithfully looking into his eyes. Saosh hugged its neck gently, tousled its hair, and then whispered right in its ear:

– Be my assistant and a friend for your whole life! Move into my drum! The horse started, stroked its hoof and said in a human voice:

– When you call me I will come. When you play the drum, I will appear. When you spin round dancing, I will carry you to heaven! – and with those words, the horse turned into the fiery whirlwind, circled above the young shaman and entered his drum, which became very heavy. At first Saosh nearly dropped it out of his hands in surprise. But caught himself in time and squeezed his hands.

In the next moment, Saosh Yant opened his eyes. It was impossible to see anything in the cave because the coals had completely burnt out. There was darkness around. The night cold persistently made its way into the dwelling of the shamans. But Kudai Kam didn't pay attention to it. Despite the darkness, he knew that Saosh was already out of the trance. So the old man broke the silence and said:

– So you found your Tyn Bur, which the ancestor shaman presented to you.

– Great! – his apprentice was looking at him in surprise. – And what does it mean?

– From now on it will carry you in all worlds of spirits and Gods. Will help you be at ease there. As well as be your motive power. Let's fire up

again.

– How does it help me? – Saosh asked, breaking the dry firewood. He still didn't understand what they were talking about.

– You see, – said the old man, – it's very important for the shaman, especially for beginners, to learn to interact with the spirits. In such a way, he will be able to escape many troubles and misfortunes and attract luck.

– How interesting!

– Earlier people were more in contact with the spirits of the dead, which also helped them a lot in their lives. Since everything is clear in their world, subtle world. Only a man lives in a limited physical world. In ignorance and spiritual blindness.

– Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, – Saosh asked, lighting a fire and feeding the flames with the dry brushwood, – and how can this world help us, living on earth?

– It depends, – the old man said with gleaming eyes, thoughtfully looking at the fire. – Mostly, the dead came in dreams and talked to the family through the shaman. Revealed their will.

– For example?

– For example, at funerals. It was a whole ceremony. The common meal with the deceased. During which he, through the shaman, revealed his last will concerning his family, the remaining property and many other things. After the funeral feast the shaman helped the deceased to go to the World of dreams, visions, to the deity, who had sent him into this world.

– And does a shaman accompany him somewhere? After all, he is the deceased! – Saosh threw up his hands in surprise.

– Of course! Since after the death the soul is lost and doesn't know where to go. It rushes about, suffers, groans. And sometimes even disturbs the living. Sends them troubles and misfortunes.

– In which case?

– For example, when its property is disposed, not in the way it wants. Or the wife got married without asking the will of the deceased. Or the wrong person. There are many different reasons, many. That is why the deceased suffers. Does a lot of bad things to the living. And to avoid it, the shaman is invited. He reveals the last will of the deceased. And takes him to the place, appropriate for his soul.

– Ah, there it is – the young man said thoughtfully.

– But it's not all, – the old man continued. – For example, if the baby died, and its mother clung onto her sadness, the shaman helped her, making the baby reborn in her womb. He performed the following ceremony: he took a bowl of water and walked with it around the grave in the direction of the sun. He filled the water with the soul of the baby and then gave it to the mother to drink. After that the baby could again be born to her into this world.

- Wow! Will I be able to do the same? – asked the boy in excitement.
- If you behave – the old man tousled his hair.
- It is too late. It's time to go to bed.

They took off their clothes, washed themselves a little, and dried themselves on rough towels and went to bed. Saosh lay under a buckskin blanket, breathing in the unique smell of the animal and could not sleep. Everything that had happened, impressed him greatly.

Meanwhile, the full Moon had come out and illuminated the surroundings with its mysterious silvery light. Its rays fancifully lit the stones of the cave, and the Spirit world seemed to be very close. So close, that it seemed to be at arm's end and he could easily again find himself in the world of the unknown. In the world of wonders and great mysteries. The line, which existed in the light of the day, separating their world from the mortal one, vanished, disappeared, faded. And as soon as Saosh realized it, the world of dreams and spirits immediately seized him...

The Sacred Shamanic Grove

In the morning, as soon as the first pink rays lit up the nearby mountains, Kudai Kam and Saosh Yant went to the sacred grove. A hardly visible track led to the mountain. But for Kudai Kam, Saosh wouldn't understand that it was a track, he silently followed his mentor, not knowing where they were going and what for. He was gradually shaking off the night's dream. On the contrary, Kudai Kam was cheerful and active as usual. But at the same time focused and even, it may be said, careful. He was listening carefully to every rustling, staring at something that only he could understand. He made sudden stops, said something quietly, or rather mumbled, and continued walking. Saosh could not understand what was going on. He also stopped, stared at what Kam was staring, but could see nothing. Then he kept on following his mentor, silently watching his behaviour. Watching Kudai Kam from the sidelines, Saosh found himself thinking, that the shaman was not walking, but as if tiptoeing. Yet again during a stop, the boy couldn't help breaking the silence.

- Sorry to bother you. Tell me, please, Kudai Kam, where are we going?
- To the sacred Grove, – the old man snapped briefly.
- Sorry, I didn't get the idea?..
- There, in those trees – Kudai Kam said, taking a breath and pointing somewhere upwards, on the mountain – the Great shamans are buried.
- Is that the reason why this groove is called sacred? – almost in a whisper asked Saosh Yant.
- Yes. It is forbidden to hew trees there, and you should approach it with reverence. Otherwise the Great shamans may not like it, and they will

become angry.

Saosh stood for a while, attentively listening to what was happening around. His skin was crawling slightly. He felt piercing chills in his body. He remembered, that always happened when he was in contact with something otherworldly and powerful. And now the situation was the same. And he knew that soon he would come in contact with something very great and important in his life.

– Can I ask you, Kudai Kam? – gently said the young man. The old man nodded stiffly, continuing to stare into the distance.

– And how can shamans be buried in trees? – asked Saosh Yant gently. – I haven't ever heard of it.

– You may have heard earlier, – replied Kudai Kam, – that shamans are buried in a special way. Are they lifted among four trees three times on Arankas?

– Yes, I've heard.

– The second one is made when the first Arankas decays with time and old age and falls to the ground. The remains of the shaman are lifted on it. When the second Arankas rots, the third one is made. After the third Arankas falls, and the bones of the shaman have been rotted on it, they are picked up. And then, after a small hollow has been made in the tree, the bones are put into it. The whole procedure is being made without damaging the tree so it can grow.

– Will I be buried in the same way? – Saosh couldn't help but ask.

– If you behave, – Kam looked at him ironically. – Let's go, – he changed his manner at the same moment. Again there was tension and concentration in his voice.

He went further along the trace, known only to him. All the time continuing to listen and stare at everything happening around him. Saosh silently followed him, continuing to catch his every movement.

After climbing up the mountain, they respectfully approached, standing atop huge hundred-year old trees and worshipped them.

– I salute you, my brothers. My predecessors. My guides! – respectfully said Kudai Kam in a hoarse voice.

And at the same moment the wind strongly, slowly and powerfully began to sing in the naked branches – that meant the deceased shamans welcomed their guests. Automatically Saosh shuddered and looked around. Fallen leaves were lying around with a patchy colourful blanket. As if reminding about the former lives of the great shamans. About their great achievements, victories and feats. After all, almost every ritual of the shaman was a contact with death. And a victory over it. And just as fallen leaves became the soil for the birth of new life, the force, Power, strength of shamans continued with their followers. And the young shaman Saosh Yant came there to inherit that Power... He stood silently, with reverence and awe waiting for

what would happen next.

– Here is the sacred grove, – said Kudai Kam solemnly and respectfully bowed, holding his right palm on his heart. Saosh Yant did the same.

– Excuse me, Kudai Kam, can I ask you something? The old man nodded silently.

– And where are the hollows? – Saosh Yant didn't understand, looking at the huge trunks.

– They are carefully masked with the bark, – replied the old man quietly, – so that no one could see the place of burial. Thus, the shaman continues his life in close connection with the tree. And coming to this groove, a person can ask for their help.

– Any person?

– No, not any, of course. The only one who deserves it. Whom the ancestor spirits let.

– Do we deserve it?

– Are you standing here?

– Yes. But it's only because of you, Kudai Kam! – said the young man simply.

– But we came here not just for fun.

– But what for?

– We will take a branch from this tree and make a kamla⁸ – beater for the drum – of it. And it will be connected with the spirit of this tree, and the shaman buried in it. Will help us in the trip in the subtle world.

– Wow, I didn't know about that. So kamla is made not just of a simple piece of wood?

– Not only kamla, but also a shell of a drum, to which the skin is pulled, is made of these trees. And what is more important, the tree, the drum is made of, must be alive, than the spirit of the tree will help perform the rituals better even of the tree, where the ancestor shaman was buried.

Having walked thrice around the tree and found the right place, where the strong thick branch was growing, Kudai Kam got on his knees. Saosh Yant did the same. The old man started to talk with the tree:

– Let us take your branch! We are taking it not for our needs, but to make a kamla, which will help people, do them good during the ceremonies. Ancestor shaman, don't be angry with us, but help us, for we are taking the brunch of your tree to be connected with you. So you can help us perform the ceremonies. To do good to people. To help them in troubles.

Then they stood up. Kudai Kam took a sharp steel knife out of his scabbard and came up to the tree branch. Gently and carefully, praying, he began to

⁸ Kamla – is a kind of magic wand doing wonders. A branch of the Tree of Life was considered a magic wand in ancient times.

cut it.

While Kudai Kam was performing a ritual, carefully cutting off the tree branch and covering the cut with a special, thus, automatically, Saosh Yant looked up and saw something strange in the naked branches of the tree. There was a broken drum as well as all torn shamanic manzhak (garment) on the upper brunches. Next to them, there was a horned deer headdress and other shamanic tools. When Kudai Kam finished, Saosh Yant awkwardly broke the silence:

– Tell me please, – he asked – what are these brought down shaman’s things doing here?

– They were broken down after his death – explained Kudai Kam – to let the spirits of these things go.

– Let go? What do you mean?

– You see, – sighed the old man – things and Kam were closely connected with each other during his life. Since these are magical things, they were his assistants and defenders. And not to part for them after the death of Kam and to let the spirits of these things go with their master. They were broken down during the ritual. Destroyed. Made to let their souls go. And now they can live together with him in the World of the dead since it’s comfortable for them to be with each other. And they want to keep together. Now, after this ritual, they are together in the World of the dead.

– A-a-ah! I suppose, I’ve understood – beamed the young man – maybe, for this purpose, different things, which belonged to the deceased, were put into the ancient burial places?

– Yes, that’s right, they are put there for this purpose. But it applies only to those things that have spirits. It is useless to put modern empty things without spirits into the grave, for they are lifeless. Just a piece of stuff.

– A-a-ah! That is why a lot of household items, jewellery, finery, and clothing were found in the ancient burial mounds. As well as dead animals and other things. Even carts were there. Just imagine!

– Really, all these are echoes of shamanism. The tradition is left from ancient times.

– And what do animals do with it?

– They are also echoes of shamanism. Since during the funerals of a shaman, his horse and deer were often killed since they were closely connected with each other.

– Just like in “Avatar”!

– I don’t know what you’re talking about. But as I can see, you know what I mean.

– Was it necessary to kill that animal?

– Yes, that was the custom. In that way, it also went to the World of the dead together with the shaman, never parting with him.

– Wow! – surprised Saosh and stopped talking, thinking.

– Now, when I make a beater of this branch – said the old man – I will perform a ritual. And will see the whole life of this branch and this tree. I will perform the ritual to gather it and put it into the kamla. Since a man, a beast, or a tree is not only what it is in the moment. But the whole life, all past life of this creature. And it is important to gather all the past and put it into the kamla to make it alive and to give power to it.

Saosh listened to him in surprise without interrupting.

– I also watched the past of this deer – continued Kam – which skin is used for the drum to make it alive and to put the deer's life in it.

– And what about us, people? We are also a part of this way? – guessed Saosh.

– Yes, that's right. What we are now is not all. Every person is a long way. The way lasting more than one life. And the human soul, once gone away from God, uses it to return to Him.

The old man started singing an old shamanic song and started carving kamla for the drum out of the branch. And Saosh was sitting near him, listening. Watching the extra pieces of wood, like fallen leaves, falling on the ground, covering it with the colourful carpet. And in this singing, he saw everything that had ever happened to that tree. From a small seed, once fallen to the ground and become the first spring sprout, to the mighty spreading tree, in the hollow of which the remains of a great man, of a mighty Kam, were buried. And, of course, up to that hour, when the branch was cut off.

In a series of images and visions, Saosh saw his own life. The life of his soul, continually wandering through different worlds, from one life to another. First coming to Gods, then returning to mortal life. Where in all this movement and chaos will he finally find peace? When will this time come? And what will he be like then? – There was no answer to those questions. He had to answer them himself.

BOOK 2

Questions

“I’ve been reading a book,” said Saosh Yant, “about shamanism by Mircea Eliade. It says that shamanism is a technique of trance, and you, Kudai Kam, how would you describe what shamanism is?”

“Trance technique is a very vague term,” said Kudai Kam. – Krishnaists also go into a trance, even drug addicts do. Shamanism is communication with spirits. This is its main essence. A shaman is one who knows how to interact with the spirits of the dead, the spirits of nature, the elements, the terrain, the spirits of the gods, and evil spirits. This is who a shaman is. Communication with spirits can be real, that is, you see them and speak with them. This is ritual communication, when a person can not see spirits but communicates with them ritually: offers sacrifices, feeds, and receives answers through card reading. Say a person throws a bowl up into the air, and if it falls downside, it means “yes.” If it falls upside down, it means «no.» And thus the spirits give answers to the person. I can tell this guy is not a shaman, so he comes up with all kinds of nonsense.

– “And what does a shaman think about monasticism?” – Saosh Yant asked.
– Monasticism is an extreme. Sometimes it’s useful: to stay alone in the forest, communicate with spirits, stay in the Place of Power, get filled with energy there. It is very important that each person secludes himself like this: in the taiga alone or with another shaman. Without this, the person will not be able to develop, life will turn into stress, and there will be diseases, failures. Since the person deprives himself of food, energy is given by nature. But then the person must go into the world to people, to help them, do good deeds, carry out the will of spirits. But monks often do not do this. They leave the world and live like egoists. If you received something from your solitude – it was given to you to give to people, to help them. So, that as a guide, you are like a flowing river and not a stagnant swamp.

The origins of shamanism

– How did shamanism appear? – Saosh Yant asked.

“This world,” replied Kudai Kam, “is populated by spirits. These are the spirits of the dead, and the spirits of nature, forests, fields, rivers, mountains, and the evil spirits of Erlik and the good spirits of Ulgen. We live with all these creatures. ”

“But why don’t we see them?” Saosh asked.

– It's all in the mind. Did you notice, "said Kudai Kam," that when you are walking through the taiga and thinking about something, you don't see anything around you, you don't notice anything?

– Yes, Kudai Kam, I got lost one time like that. And the other time, I didn't notice how I was next to the bear.

– You see? I am not even speaking about spirits. To see them, your mind must be silent. No thought should bother it. But the body also interferes – its sensory organs cannot see spirits.

Our souls see them – they have many amazing powers and abilities. But focusing on the body prevents this. You must try to get out of the body, and then you will get into the world of spirits.

– And how to do it? – Saosh Yant asked.

– Tyn-Bura, that is, a shamanistic trance, helps all of this. When you dance with a drum and become this dance, silence comes. And then you get out of the body and communicate with the spirits. God is a dancer, His creation is a dance, and He is inseparable from his creation.

The artist is separated from the painting, the sculptor – from the statue. But God is creation; He is not divided with it. Therefore, by practising Tyn-Bura, you too can reach God and enter His world. Jaw harp music, drum

– everything helps this. You only need to practice. "How did the shamans learn this?" Saosh asked.

– Here is how it was. Small tribes of 20-30 people lived in the taiga. Life was very difficult, and they had to survive. And for this, they had to know what the weather would be like, where the beast would be for hunting, where to look for a beast that got lost or was wounded by a hunter, and how to cure a disease if it was created by an evil spirit or the curse of Ayami, if a person broke the taboo, let's say. But how to do it when in a normal condition, a person is in ignorance? And the spirits of the ancestors, that is, the dead really wanted to help their relatives. They see and know all this. But how to inform the relatives if they can not hear them? And then the ancestors looked for a medium, that is, a more gifted person from the tribe, and pulled their souls out of the body in order to teach them how to communicate with them, to see the world of spirits. It seemed to the person that he was losing his mind, but gradually he got used to it. And the spirits were teaching him to shamanize and enter this state when his souls rise above the body consciously. And so, he became ashaman.

– And why now do the ancestors not make their relatives shamans? – Saosh Yant asked.

– What do you mean they don't? They do. But this happens only in the tribes that live in the forest, since in the blossom of nature a man is closer to the world of spirits, he is not so blinded by the mind, he is more sensitive, essential. But in the city, when a person receives a lot of unnecessary

information: at the institute, in the cinema, communicating with a large number of people, playing with a computer or telephone, he becomes closed, insensitive to the influence of spirits. Of course, spirits can help in the city too, and a person can become a psychic medium or a magician. But often, such a person may not be understood. When he behaves inappropriately, they consider him insane and put him in a psychiatric hospital instead of teaching him to be a shaman. And the spirits of the ancestors have now become different. A lot of evil people who become Erlik's servants carry evil, illness, obsession, and push their relatives and other people to crime. Some of them cannot get used to the subtle plan after death for a long time. Such people cannot help in a good deed.

– What should a modern man do to be a shaman?

“The first thing he should do is decide to do good, help people, and start doing it the way he can. Say, help the elderly or the disabled, cultivate exhaled emotions, love, compassion, and mercy. Then he will attract good spirits to himself, and they will help him reveal his abilities so that he can do more good, say, heal people, set them on the right path, comfort the soul, and the like. Then he can begin to do spiritual practices, and his abilities begin to unfold. And if he finds a good shaman, he will teach him everything, and he too can become a shaman. Earlier, this was easier since a man knew the shamanistic tradition. He fed spirits since childhood and revered Ayami. And now he has to learn how to do it. In addition, he must communicate a lot with nature, live in the forest, and be in seclusion from the world. Then his sensitivity will grow, his Kut will develop – the power of essence, and he can become a good shaman. In nature, he will be closer to perfume. But the main thing is silence.

One must go into it all the time because the vanity of thoughts prevents a person from understanding the truth, seeing the subtle plan, or hearing the voice of spirits.”

– And how do spirits talk to a person? Saosh asked.

– A person should be more contemplative, attentive, and watchful. Spirits speak through signs. Let's say a black cat ran – this is a sign, or he saw a dream – this is also a sign. They communicate with us through emotional feelings and conditions that come to us. And you need to listen to this, and then you will be a shaman.

Through the Sun

Once, Saosh Yant brought a scientific journal to Kudai Kam's tent.

“Look, Kudai Kam,” said Saosh Yant, “it says that soon the astronauts will land on Mars. And in the future, perhaps, they will reach the nearest stars.” It only takes a long time to fly there, and life may not be enough. I wished they had invented teleportation, and then it would be possible to fly there

instantly.

"I am surprised at you, people. You want to take your body everywhere with you," said Kudai Kam. – So, when I became a shaman, I was able to fly everywhere. I began to fly in the soul of Sur. I was on the Moon and Mars. Sometimes, I'm lying on the grassplot, looking at the starry sky, at some star, and I wonder what's there, and I'm flying there to see what's there. I have even flown through the Sun. It is very unusual there. But then I got bored of it. It is much more interesting in the world of spirits. It is many times larger than all galaxies and more lively and interesting than the physical world. It is more like a desert or the bottom of the ocean, where nothing exists.

"Why didn't you stay there?" – Saosh Yant asked.

"That's because," said Kudai Kam, "a shaman should help people. This is the highest thing that can be in the Universe – helping people. If I didn't have a physical body, then people could not hear me. They would be able to see me only in a dream, but they could forget or not believe the dream. Without a physical body, almost nothing can be done in the physical world, and people suffer and they need help.

"Why do we live here if it is so difficult?" – Saosh Yant asked. – I wish I lived in the world of spirits.

"And we all lived there, and we will. But Tengri, the boundless sky, creates many very strange worlds, such as the earthly physical world, and someone has to inhabit them. This is why we were sent here for some period of time to support its game. Some were sent in the form of plants, some in the form of insects or fish.

– And why all this? – Saosh Yant asked.

"How shall I explain ..." said Kudai Kam. – Here, it's as if they are making a movie, which then will be watched by all Aliens since they feed on impressions. And therefore, the drama unfolding in each of the worlds is needed for this. This, of course, is only one of the meanings of life, but in fact, there are countless of them.

– What are Aliens doing watching this film? – Saosh Yant asked.

– They often wander here and locate an insect and perceive everything as an insect. Then they locate into a plant and live the life of a plant. Then they locate into a fish, etc. And due to this, living pieces of someone's lives, they get their food and impressions since, in their disembodied state, there is nothing more to get impressions from. And Tengri swallows trillions of them. For one instant, it has lived entire millennia, the lives of many creatures, since it perceives everything at a very high speed as if countless films would be scrolled in one second, and it would see and feel them all at once.

– And how do I understand that someone has located in me? – Saosh Yant asked.

– If you feel that someone is looking with your eyes, hear with your ears – this is Aiyi.

“But I felt that someone was looking at me,” said Saosh Yant.

– These are the spirits. They often watch us.

“It means that physical immortality is stupid,” Saosh Yant said.

“There would be no worse punishment if a person, even while remaining young and healthy, could not die,” said Kudai Kam. – A man wants immortality only because he does not know what awaits him after death. And therefore, he is afraid. But this is good, otherwise, everyone would try to die ahead of time if they knew how good it is to live in the world of spirits.

“So death is not the worst thing that can happen to us,” said Saosh Yant.

“You guessed it right. It’s rather a blessing, a gift from God. That is, in our world, everything is not in vain, including death. Everything is wisely created by Tengri.

The Cruel World

“Why did the kind, loving Tengri create such an evil world?” – Saosh Yant asked Kudai Kama.

“It was in this way,” the shaman answered. – At first, Tengri created heavenly paradisaal worlds of the subtle plan, where there was only joy and grace. But the souls Aiyi created by him could not appreciate it because they did not know anything else. After all, if a person eats only sugar, then they cannot understand what is sweet. You have to eat bitter, sour, etc., to appreciate the sweet. And besides, the souls were very naive because they only knew the truth and never faced lies and cunning. Satisfied with paradise, the souls prayed to Tengri: “Do something so that we can enjoy the paradise of the seventh heaven more as if we can see the paradise for the first time and amaze at everything that is here.” And then Tengri created the Earth.

“And what about stars and galaxies?” – Saosh Yant asked.

“The Earth means the entire physical material world,” replied Kudai Kam.

– And black holes? – Saosh Yant asked.

– And them too. By the way, I have flown to the beginning of time,” said Kudai Kam,” and see that our galaxy was created from the explosion of a huge black hole. It is, as it were, the seed from which the flower of the galaxy emerges. And then again, the whole galaxy is pulled together into a black hole. And then again, the explosion gives rise to a new physical universe. But this is not a chaotic explosion, but a very orderly, rational one, from which the earthly world arises since this explosion is controlled by God. Well, we are distracted from our topic, said Kudai Kam. – And Tengri told the souls: “I created the world completely opposite to paradise. Here you

can gain a lot of new perceptions, you will be an insect and a plant, and an animal, and a man, and an evil and kind spirit, and the Sun and the Moon. You will know what the limitation of the body is. You will know evil, pain, lies, old age and death."

"This is some kind of extreme tour," said Saosh Yant.

"You guessed right," said Kudai Kam. "And we'll play hide and seek, that is, you will forget your divine nature, forget Tengri, but there will be dissatisfaction and suffering in your soul, and you will look for the answer to the question: why is it so bad on Earth for you. And this will lead you to the memory of who you really are and the memory of me, Tengri. And first, you will pray that I will change the earthly world. But having become wise, you will find yourself and go into the paradise world. And then you will see everything with new eyes and be surprised at paradise. And, you will be able to look at it with everything that you were: as a plant, an insect, a beast, a person, a spirit, as the Sun and the Moon. And you will be able to look at the world of the Earth. And when it becomes boring, then you will go downthere to renew your perception.

– This is some kind of reality show! – Saosh Yant said.

"Yes," said Kudai Kam, "something similar." "What shall we do to break out of there?" asked Aiyies. "You need to resist the laws of the earthly world, where one devours the other, where everyone thinks how to begin to parasitize others, how to humiliate someone, to rise above the others, how to do evil to someone, and when they see others suffering, rejoice, that they are in a better position. Where lies, negative emotions and blindness rule. Where everyone considers themselves not a soul, but a body, not a part of God, but those nicknames that others give them. Where they live not with love but with curses cast by a dark environment, a sick society. But when you meet my messengers and hear their words, you will resist the evil and the laws of this world. And you will bring the laws and blessings of heaven therein: kindness, love, compassion, selflessness, awareness, prayer, awakening and blessing other creatures living in misery. Then you will be close to awakening and realizing your nature. And then you will be lifted up to paradise."

"Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life!" Saosh Yant said, paraphrasing a Christian prayer.

"This is true," said Kudai Kam, "all religions speak of this since all were created by the messengers of Tengri."

– Why, then, are religions at enmity with each other, and the priests were burning drums of shamans?

"This is due to ignorance," replied Kudai Kam. – The truth is one, but the sages speak about it differently. And fools and villains cling to these differences and seek to destroy anyone who thinks differently.

"It's horrible," said Saosh Yant.

"Yes, it is a nightmare," answered Kudai Kam. "But that's exactly what will help souls become wiser, exposing the tricks and lies of rulers and priests." This is also the intention of Tengri, so that the souls are not in a state of childish naivety as they were in paradise.

"Is it like Adam and Eve, who ate an apple?"

– Yes, this myth is just very similar to what I told you. But it is not complete. Priests always convey half-truths to people.

"And who is the fallen angel?"

– This is also a myth about the indulgence of souls into the physical world, where its laws of evil capture them.

"Are we all devils here?" – Saosh Yant asked.

– Something like that. We all play evil, and we must confront the demon in ourselves in order to manifest the angelic nature, no matter how difficult it may seem, how much the demon inspires fear that you will stop being like everyone else and you will be stoned. Fear is the Devil's main tool that keeps us in our sleep. Fear for the demon in you so you do not lose it.

Influence of Fate

"Who is closer to God," Saosh Yant asked Kudai Kam, "a man or a woman?"

"That's a good question," said Kudai Kam. – A woman should be closer to God. She is more refined. She has a more developed emotional centre, and it is through exhaled emotions that we comprehend God.

"And what about philosophy?" Saosh Yant asked.

"It can only indicate where to look for God, but He can not be perceived with his mind. And the exhaled emotions, having reached the highest degrees of love and grace, reach a merger with Tengri. A woman is more kind and compassionate, she has more love in her, and she is more receptive. But there is one big «but.»

"What is this? – Saosh Yant asked. "This is what nature set up a woman. "Why so? – surprised Saosh Yant.

"It is that a woman is focused on finding a partner, giving birth to a child and everything connected, therefore, And a man was given more freedom. He must enrich the gene pool with new impressions. So a man explores distant countries, pursues science, philosophy, etc. Of course, a woman, when she gets older and this program backs off, may also become interested in this, but it may already be too late, as in the saying – "If youth knew what age you would crave."

"So what's to be done? – Saosh Yant asked.

"There is only one way out – to find a man who would lead her to God since a woman is an ideal student. A woman will constantly suffer from

another man since he cannot give her anything. And a man should develop an emotional centre, exhale emotions, and become more refined and receptive. Then he will be able to perceive Tengri.

Shamanic Disease

Saosh Yant ran into Kudai Kam's tent with wild-looking eyes and, falling on the floor, yelled:

– Save me, Kudai Kam. I'm going crazy!

Kudai Kam sat him on a deer rug, gave him herbal tea and said:

"Don't worry, and a shamanistic disease began in you. You are being pulled out of the body by spirits Ayami and the shaman-ancestor Kara Kam so that you become comfortable in the world of spirits.

"But I am very scared," said Saosh Yant, "spirits attack me and scare me, they torture me."

"These are the spirits that have been attached to you since childhood and have taught you how to serve them," said Kudai Kam.

– What does it mean? – surprised Saosh Yant. "I have not seen them before."

"You have not seen them because the flesh has blocked your perception of the world of spirits." You saw only the physical world, but they created bad thoughts, fear, greed, and anger in you and feed on it. And you identified with every bad thought, justified negative emotions, thought that it was all yours. But this is who Erlik's servants exploited you, parasitized you, making you sick and unhappy. And now, when the shaman ancestor pulled you into the subtle plan, you saw them firsthand.

– Kudai Kam, I have been running around the taiga for three days and almost died. I had some kind of insanity.

"It was Ayami who drove you through the lineage territory. Tell me, what did you see?

– First, I ran to the cemetery and saw that the dead were standing over the graves. I recognized some of them, and some I did not. I was terribly scared, yelled and ran on.

"It was you who saw your ancestors, whom you should turn to for help during shamanistic rituals. They can help you find out everything you want, even the most difficult thing, the future since any information is open to them. And you, because the physical body limits you, you live in ignorance. They can drive away evil spirits because they, too, live in the subtle plane. You will also have the opportunity to know a lot and fight evil spirits when you learn to leave the body.

"Then I ran into the forest and crashed there with my head into a large pine, lost consciousness and fell," Saosh Yant said. – And when I got up, I

ran on, and then I began to hug a large birch, which had a broken main trunk, and the branches grew like trunks, and it seemed to me that it had a hundred trunks.

“These are drum trees,” said Kudai Kam. – One will have to carefully cut the drum ring from a pine tree, so it remains alive. And one will make tampon and handle of the drum from birch branches. These trees will help you in the shamanistic rituals.

– Then I wandered around the taiga for a long time and almost drowned in a swamp.

“This is Erlik’s swamp,” said Kudai Kam, “here you will bring Kang dolls, that is, wooden figures on which you will use charcoal to paint the faces of evil spirits, instil them into them and throw them into this swamp.”

– Then, howling, I ran through the taiga and saw a big stone, and under it, there was a hole as big as a den. I climbed there and fell asleep.

– This is the place where you will hide your Tyn-bura, the spirit of shamanic ecstasy, and your horse, who will carry you around all the shamanistic worlds so that it will not be found by black shamans who can kidnap it to take your power. And you will die because of it. Therefore, you will have to charge guard there of your assistant spirits so that they guard Tyn-bura. And during the shamanistic ritual, you will call them to come and help you. This is your secret place for shamans – a pound for spirits.

– Then I climbed the hill, and at its top, I began to jump, trying to get to the sky until I fell from fatigue.

“This is a place of power where you will do shamanistic rituals to Ulgen and Tengri and their spirits, asking for their support and attracting the souls of children and good events,” said Kudai Kam.

– Then I ran through the taiga and saw a larch, and although it was cold and raining, I hung all my clothes on it and ran naked.

– This is your shaman tree, on which you will hang your torn drums and shaman costumes that will wear out. And after death, your shamanistic robes and your drum will be hung here, breaking it and tearing these clothes in order to release spirits from them. And next to it, they will make a platform on four pillars, arancas, where your body will be laid.

– Then I chased the deer and somehow returned home, shaking from the cold.

– This is the deer from which the drum membrane will be made. Spirits gave you it to become your Tyn-bura.

At that, Kudai Kam put the exhausted Saosh Yant to sleep on a deerskin, covering him with his sheepskin coat.

The World Tree

“Do you know what a world tree is?” – asked Kudai Kam Saosh Yant when the latter woke up.

“Well, this is the tree that connects the three worlds,” replied Saosh Yant, sitting down on the skin of a deer at the hearth on which tea from Siberian herbs was already boiling in a pot.

It was warm and comfortable in the tent. The fire crackled, casting its glare on the walls of the tent.

“You have no core,” continued Kudai Kam, “so any spirit can take hold of you, and you, like a rag, succumb to any negative thought or emotion that it impresses on you.”

– What can be done about it, Kudai Kam? – Saosh Yant asked, remembering how he was scared by spirits during a shamanic illness.

“You must find the world tree in yourself – the old man fed the fire and the images of spirits and Gods and poured tea.”

“Your body is this tree,” he continued. – Legs are the roots, arms are the branches, the body is the trunk, and the head is the top of the tree. Feel it in yourself. Saosh Yant straightened up and tried to feel like a tree.

– Above the top of the tree is the Shaman-Teacher and good spirits, that is, something that leads you to the Gods. Above the Master, there is Ulgen, above it, there is the Tengri. Feel devotion and dedication to the Higher Forces. This is the main basis of your inner core, which will connect you with heaven, with the highest governing Force, without which you will be food for evil spirits, like most people. The demon of communism and others before it tried to break the top of the tree among people. They shot and imprisoned shamans who helped people not to lose connection with heaven. They burned drums and threw mud at shamans. And many fools succumbed to their propaganda, so they moved away from the tradition of their ancestors and began to ruin themselves by drinking, turning into communist zombies.

Although this demon is defeated now, others appear and throw mud at all spiritual people. They invented the word «sect» to intimidate simpletons and throw mud at everything bright to turn them away from the boundless heaven and make them slaves of evil and despiritualization. As soon as a person turns away from heaven and the holy people leading them to heaven, they lose their mind immediately and become the prey of demons. Demons can twist them around their finger as many times as they want. Although they do not have a shamanistic illness, they are insane. Therefore, never lose your devotion and dedication to heaven, serve their great will, only then will you be on the right path and gain great wisdom. Turning to the Supreme, Saosh Yant began to feel how his condition was changing as if he was becoming taller.

– Can you feel your condition changing when you have exhaled emotions?, asked Kudai Kam.

“Yes,” replied Saosh Yant. – It’s as if I am being transformed by light. Everything in me starts changing: emotions, thoughts, condition.

“And this is only the beginning,” said Kudai Kam. “You will become a god-man, the spirit of Tengri will wake up in you if you cultivate exhaled emotions for a long time, turning to Heaven.

Next is the trunk. If the head is the upper world, then the trunk is the middle one, that is, the world of the earth. It is the connection with the earth, that is, with Ayami, which gives you power. Not without reason, before going to a foreign land, people took a handful of their native land in order to feel the connection with their homeland. This gave them a connection with Ayami and more energy to overcome everything.

But nowadays, the concept of homeland is perverted. It is used by politicians to manipulate people. Therefore, when they say «homeland,» you must hear the «ruling elite.» To defend their “homeland” means to defend the interests of this “elite”.

But there is a real homeland, and you must feel it when you walk in the forests, and fields, see mountains, and rivers, and feel their soul of Ayami. Now people have lost the link with nature, living in cities. Because of this, everyone has been sick and weak from childhood. Children get sick all the time, and they get tired quickly. This is because they do not walk in the forest, they have lost a link with their land. But the one who will constantly walk in the forest will find this connection. Strength, health and peace will come to this person.

Saosh Yant recalled how he once lived in the city, and indeed, he felt sick there. He was always in a state of anxiety, and he wanted to eat and sleep. He felt sick, broken. But as soon as he returned to the taiga, he immediately returned to his strength and state of grace and happiness.

“But living in the city all the time, people don’t feel how they rob themselves,” said Kudai Kam. “However, it is not enough to get connected with Ayami. You must serve your land, do goodness, and help people. Set your heart on kindness and service to people.

Saosh Yant felt how power and light went through him from above and began to pour out on everything around him, how he was becoming a source of happiness and love.

“It’s amazing how I changed,” he said.

– You started feeling what a normal person should feel, having a world tree in him. But the tree also has roots. These are your ancestors. True, now people have degenerated, degraded, often give birth to children from anybody, live with alcoholics, they are unable to teach their child anything but negative emotions and weak thoughts. Therefore, many people have rotten roots. But in any case, the dead ancestors who are in the world of Erlik become better there and will help you and others who will turn to them.

Erlik is behind the ancestors. This is the great pillar of death. Death, if you

accept it and stop fearing it, will give you great power. Feel it. Saosh Yant tuned in to death and felt detached and deep as if everything in this life was becoming clear, and peace and sobriety came.

"Yes, this is an incomparable condition," he said.

"Now it is still weak and unstable," said Kudai Kam, "but when you go through the shamanistic dissection and know death completely, you will consider yourself dead, then this condition will be in you constantly. Now you have connected the three worlds with your tree, and you have become a complete person, not a shapeless clot of something unclear, from which demons can sculpt anything and build you.

Spirits live at the expense of your negative emotions. They give you rest, gain energy, and then let in another evil thought and cause negative emotions, which they feed on. And this is what happens during all life, therefore, all people suffer like this. But if they found the world tree in them, then their misfortunes would cease, and they would begin to live according to their predestination, as the Gods conceived them.

Paths of the Spirits

"So that you can defeat the spirits, I will teach you a shamanic cry." This is an ancient formula that creates the correct condition and strikes at the forces of darkness when pronounced correctly. In the beginning, you should feel the shaman tree in yourself, concentrate on the place of Umai. For men, this is the solar plexus, for women – the womb. Umai will give you power," said Kudai Kam.

– You should shout out the cry «Khurai» with a sharp exhalation and a great power in a low voice, imagining how the energy that pushes evil spirits and strikes them is radiated out of you. You can help yourself with your hands and put them down sharply with palms down when exhaling, or put them forward with palms forward. Often shamans take a weapon: a spear or a sword, and make a blow with them, often simply imagining them in their hand, making hand movements as if there was a sword, striking the spirit. "Strange, this crying sounds similar to the cry "Hurray," said Saosh Yant.

– You guessed correctly, "Hurray" is an abbreviated sound from "Khurai".

– Can I make karate kicks? I used to do karate, and there was something similar, they also shouted out "Ha" with a sharp exhalation.

– Yes, this you can do too. The main thing is to feel the tree, the three worlds and their energy to direct to this kick.

Saosh Yant made several kicks, shouting "Khurai".

"Not bad," said Kudai Kam, "but you are identified with the kick and at the same time lose the tree. In which case you will act only with your energy, you

will not have the support of the forces of the three worlds.” This way, you can not defeat strong demons. Therefore, act more absently, maintaining contact with the worlds.

Saosh Yant made a few more kicks and felt both above, behind, and below him, there was a huge force that helped him and passed through his hand. “Now, it’s getting better,” said Kudai Kam. – After the kick, now with calm power, say gently in a low voice “Mangalam” and feel detached. Create a protective sphere of energy around you.

Saosh Yant made a kick with a cry “Khurai,” and then said “Mangalam,” but he couldn’t quickly switch from one state to another.

“It’s all right,” said Kudai Kam, “it will work out over time.” The main thing is to hold the inner core and contact with the three worlds. To begin with, you can make a kick, feeling one of the worlds, so that there is more concentration. And later, you will feel them immediately. Saying «Mangalam», it is good to help with your hands, lifting them up, shouting out the cry and at the same time lowering your hands through the sides down, as if creating a sphere. This will enhance its effect.

Kudai Kam took a drum and began to warm it over the fire.

“Now, let’s go with you to the world of spirits and see who scared you.”

He began to beat the drum, singing a shamanic song in the form of a series of strange sounds. Saosh Yant prepared for the shamanic cry, and felt the tree, the three worlds.

And then terrible monsters appeared in front of him and attacked him. He shouted Khurai sharply and attacked them shouting. Monsters flew off and turned into trembling ghosts. He uttered «Mangalam» and surrounded himself with a protective sphere. He recognized his fear, anger and jealousy, which tormented him all his life, in the monsters. He gave so much time and energy to feeding these insatiable spirits.

Kudai Kam beat the drum loudly, and everything disappeared.

“Don’t calm down,” he said. “They will be back, and the battle is not over. Envy, resentment and other demons will again try to eat you, and you will need to constantly knock them out of their four souls. They will hide under various masks of justice, order, dishonesty of someone and other excuses in order to allow you to let in bad false thoughts and negative emotions again. But you must not give in to this. “Resist the devils, and they will flee from you,” Kudai Kam taught. “Now, I will introduce you to the spirits of disease. They, unlike the spirits of negative emotions, have physical bodies.

– What does it mean? – Saosh Yant asked.

– Their bodies are special and often invisible. These are viruses, bacteria, worms and other parasites, and tumors, such as cancer. Doctors learned to fight their physical bodies. But shamans in the taiga had no medicine, and they destroyed the spirit of the disease, and then its physical body also perished. And now I will show them to you. You will need to instill this

spirit in yourself, get to know it, feel it, and then lay it out for you. So you will know all the evil spirits and learn how to deal with them.

Usually, spirits may act together. At first, the spirit of negative emotions weakens Kut of a man, his protective power, immunity, and then illnesses attack him. The struggle with the spirit is not with a physical body but with soul of Sur. You have to make your Sur, that is, your image of yourself, strong and not a «poor average man.»

Shamans take the form of bears, tigers, and bulls to fight enemies. This way, they make themselves stronger in life. You must have the image of a hero so that you can cope with all its difficulties. But people started spoiling children often, and they grew up very weak, not capable of anything. They used to say, “Do not disgrace our lineage. You are a descendant of Genghis Khan. There were no wimps in our lineage.”

Kudai Kam started beating his drum and called his Tyn-bura – a large deer with branching horns. They sat on it and flew to the place of the spirits of disease. The first one they met was the spirit of obesity in the form of a disgusting jellyfish. It attacked Saosh Yant. He took the image of a fierce bear and attacked it with a roar. They fought for a long time. And then the spirit receded, and Saosh Yant freed himself from its sticky embrace.

A huge octopus was the next they saw. This octopus attacked Saosh Yant. It was the spirit of cancer. And it began to squeeze him, penetrating into his body. Saosh Yant reincarnated as a huge bull but could not cope with it, and, finally, the spirit began to choke him. Saosh Yant felt that he was dying. And cried out:

– Kudai Kam, help me! I’m dying!

Kudai Kam gave a whistle, and then his assistant spirits appeared and dragged the octopus from Saosh Yant with great difficulty.

“You can die this way,” said Kudai Kam. – Some weak shamans died in the fight against the spirits of the disease.

Moving further along the roads of disease, they saw a yellow fog with many fanged mouths. A fire erupted from each mouth, and they hissed.

– This is the vilest spirit of AIDS. It quietly devours the soul of Kut, and then, when a person is deprived of protective power, the spirits of other diseases devour him,” said Kudai Kam.

The spirit shrouded Saosh Yant with fog and began chewing him with many of its mouths. Saosh Yant turned into a wolf, and began to attack the spirit of AIDS, but he just went through the fog and could not catch it. At that time, its mouths were biting him from one side and the other, and he could not do anything with it.

– Kudai Kam, help me! It will bite me to death! Shouted Saosh Yant. Kudai Kam whistled, and the assistant spirits attacked the AIDS. But they, too, could not do anything to it. Then Kudai Kam began to beat his drum and

call to Ayami. It appeared and set up a protective sphere around Saosh Yant so that the mouths his against it but could not penetrate inside. They left this spirit under the protection of this sphere.

“Fighting spirits is not an easy task,” said Kudai Kam. – This is the whole art of a shaman, and you have to master it. Now let’s go master the path to Erlik. – said, Kudai Kam.

And they went along the world river which, passing the middle world, turned into a river of tears and blood instead of a river of milk with honey banks in its head, in the kingdom of Ulgen, as it was saturated with the suffering of the Earth. Then they saw soaring babies caught by Ulgen’s assistants. They wanted to escape from them with a cry but could not.

– What is it? – Saosh Yant asked.

– These are the souls of children who died being infants. They are being led to a new incarnation since they have not gone their own way, and have not received all the lessons set for them.

“And what are they struggling with?” – Saosh Yant asked.

“Because they don’t want to live in hell, since the Earth is hell compared to the subtle plane, and the lessons they are very painful. Being in a physical body compared to being in only five souls is like a dungeon. So they cry, anticipating their torment, living in constant difficulties and ignorance. But they will forget everything, and they will have nothing to compare their earthly faith with once they are pushed into the body of a newborn. This is very wise, otherwise, they would die of grief or kill their body in order to get out of it.

“But how can one no longer incarnate?” – Saosh Yant asked.

– For this, you must renounce everything that you are not. You are Tengri, but you forgot about it and became what you are identified with. Something he is identified with: flesh, thoughts, emotions, self-image, clothing, social status, nationality, work, etc. That is, thousands of things, but it’s not him. These are only masks, roles, bindings, delusions, memory, and reactions. And you need to separate yourself from all this to find your true self and remember that you are Tengri, to wake up from this dream, this identification. Both twinges and hardships of this life are alarms that push to awakening. If not for suffering, no one would ever wake up and find themselves.

Walking further, they reached the Chinvat bridge, a horse-hair thick at the place where the river of tears poured into the ocean of grief, where terrible monsters swam. This bridge led into the kingdom of Erlik, beyond which was the better World of ancestors. The dead crowded around the bridge and could not cross this bridge, falling into a river of fire and then getting out of the ocean of grief screaming, driven by monsters from there.

“Why can’t these people go to the other side?” – Saosh Yant asked.

“These are either great sinners whom no one wants to help or people who suffered death: warriors, drowned men, self-murderers, those who died in accidents. They have a very strong soul, Kut, since they are still young and

healthy. And they need the efforts of a shaman to help them cross the bridge to the paradise worlds of their ancestors. And they begin to wander around the Earth until their Kut is exhausted. And some can even turn into ghouls who do not feed on blood but on the energy of living things, especially people. Shamans often had to make bloody sacrifices so that evil spirits or ghouls left off if they could not cope with them in another way. And then they, saturated with blood, or rather the Kut energy of a killed animal, left people living alone. This way, one could lay the spirit of an incurable disease.

– Maybe that's they bury the self-murderers separately from others? – Saosh Yant asked.

– In other traditions, this is done to intimidate people with suicidal tendencies. And shamans have two cemeteries: the first is where they bury people who died by their natural death, and they conduct a ritual of communication with their ancestors. And the second – where they bury those who suffered death. Everyone is afraid of this cemetery, as there may be ghouls that will cause harm and disease to the living people. Evil people tormented others during their lifetime and were Erlik's guides become his servants, and demons after death and continue to do evil after death. And those who were saints, after the second death in the world of Erlik, become Tengri's assistants. Good people, after the second death in the world of their ancestors, go to the Ulgen and become his assistants until a new incarnation.

– And, shall we go to the other side of the river of tears? – Saosh Yant asked.

– No, it's too early for you to go there. Only the most powerful shamans can go there since from there, you may not return. Look, you see nine maids on the other side?

Saosh Yant saw black maids with long black hair who were dancing and wriggling like snakes. They had snake eyes and tongues.

– Who are they? – Saosh Yant asked.

“These are Erlik's daughters. They seduce shamans, and take away the sacrifice the shaman brings to Erlik to redeem the soul of the dying man from the master of the lower world. And they can bewitch him so that he will forget the way back and remain their captive. They often come into our world, making people fanatics or zombies, trying to seduce the saints, appearing to them in a vision, interrupt their spiritual practice, begloom people and make them kill others or themselves, instil excitement and make a person lose all the money. Therefore, a person must be very careful not to let him be seduced by the imagination. Deformed imagination and the diabolical power of Erlik's daughters, with the help of which they create their evil, and all people live in a dream of this imagination, being deceived by it all the time, not seeing reality.

– How to cope with the imagination? – Saosh Yant asked.

– For this, one must establish silence and peace of mind, silence. Then it will be possible to wake up from a dream inspired by these daughters.







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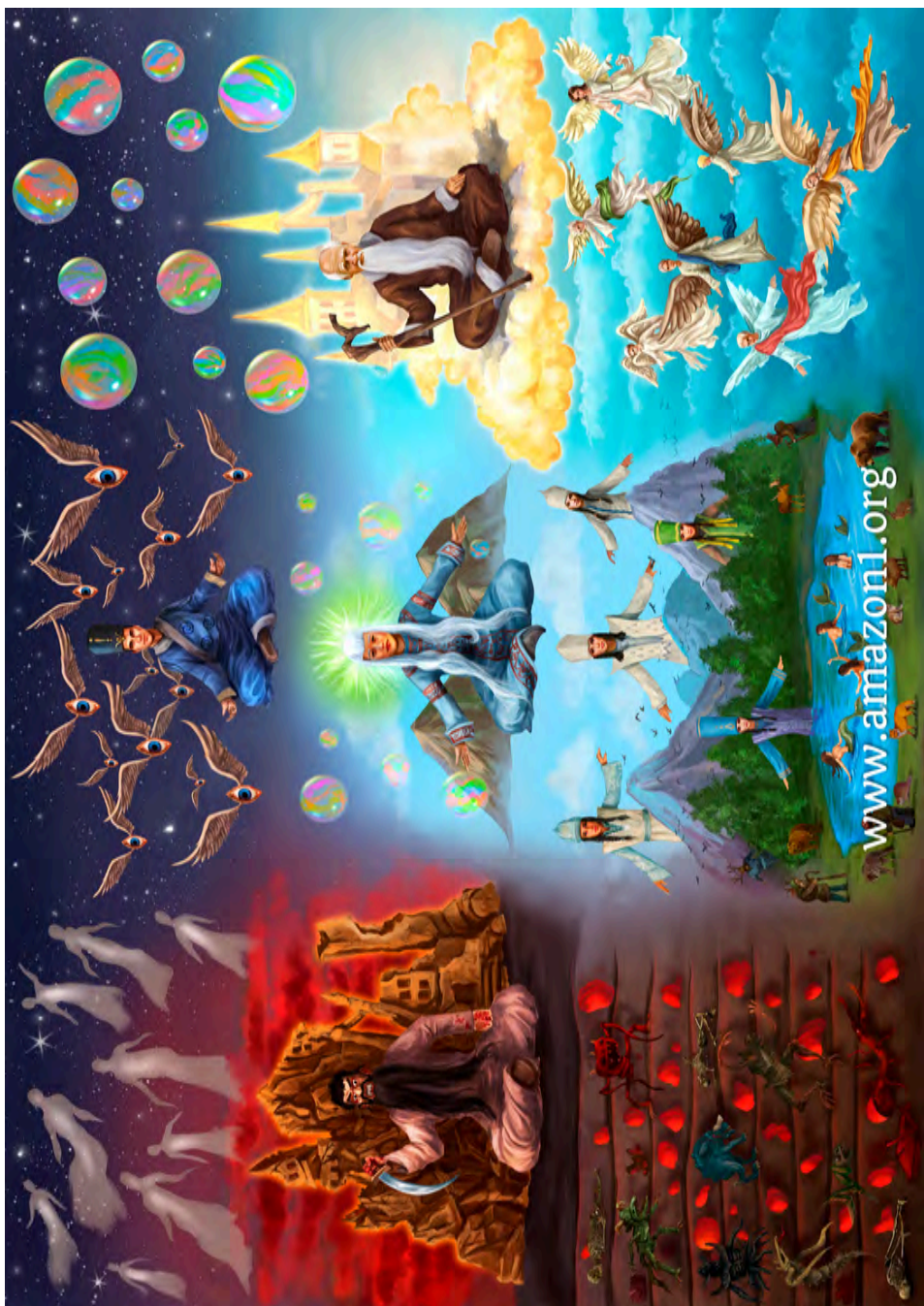


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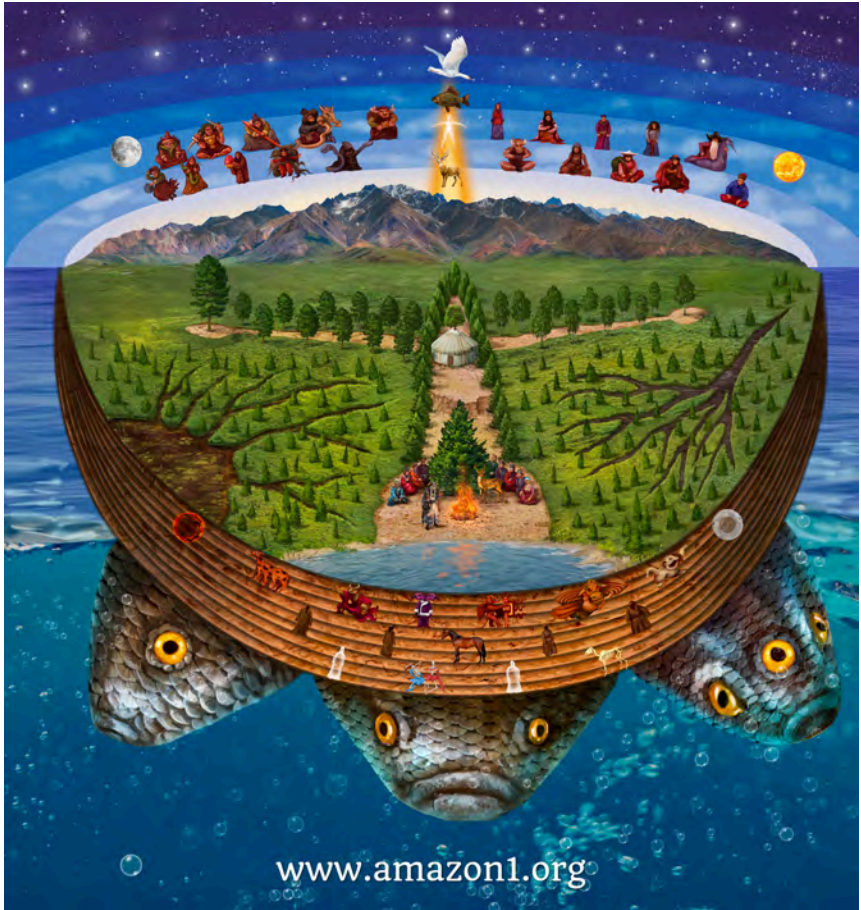
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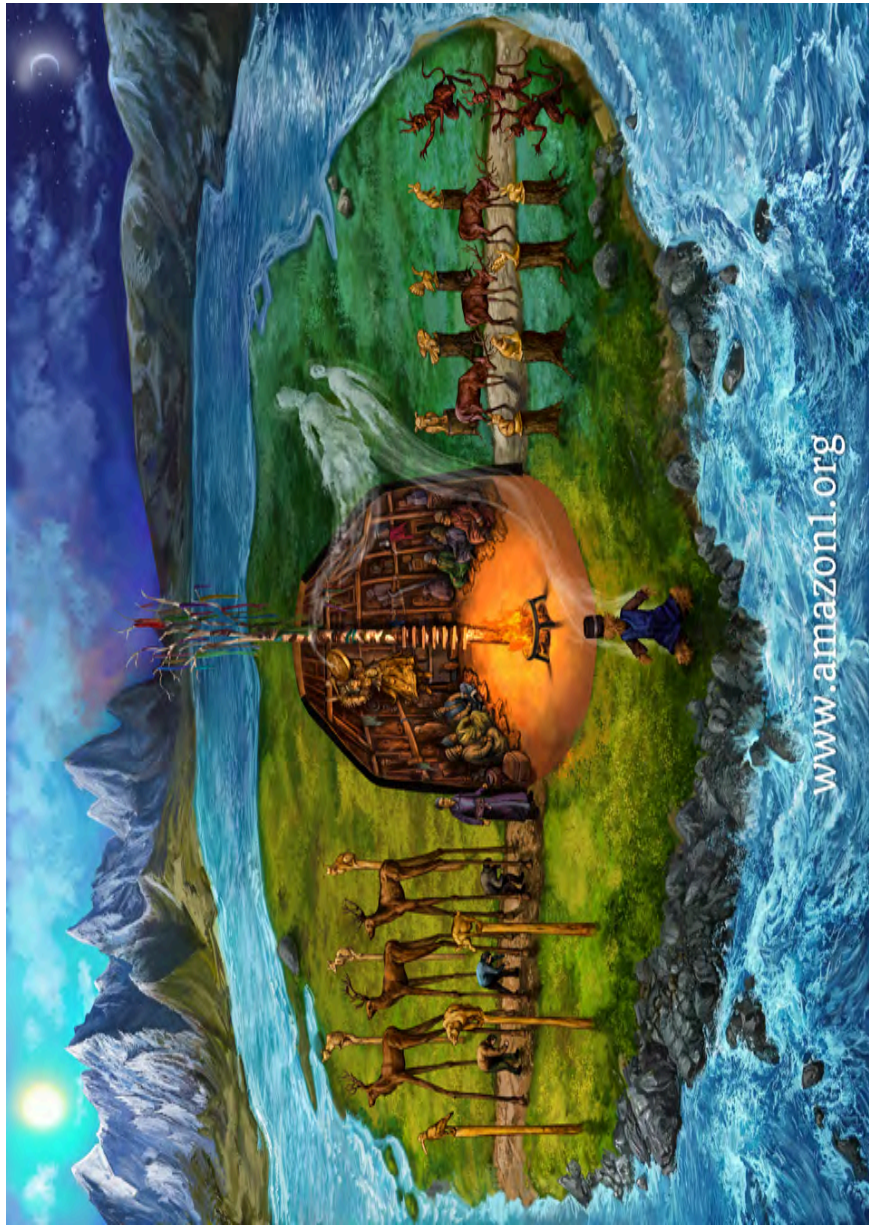






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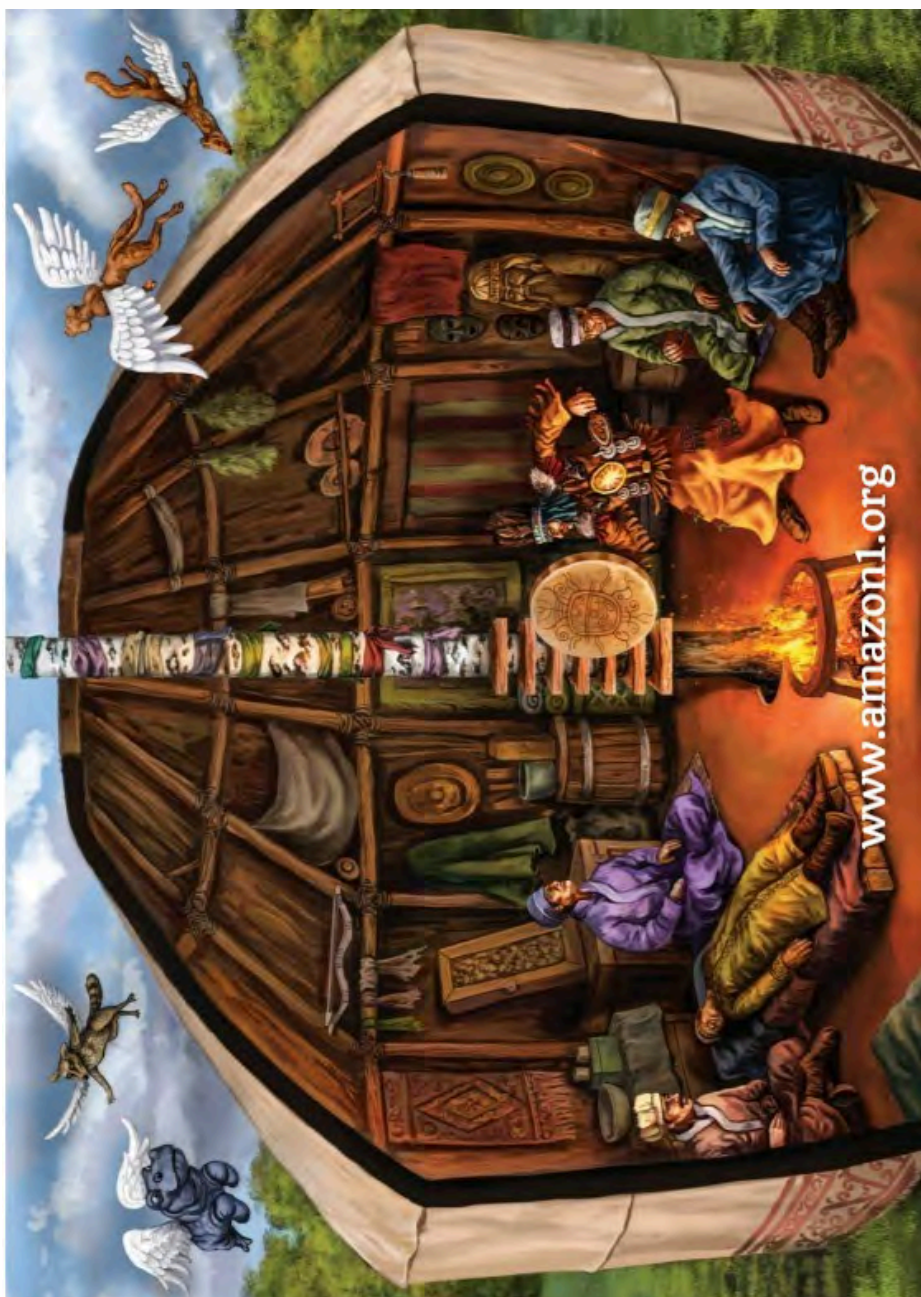
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