

ALI ZAMANI ALAVIJEH

A Survey of Mongols and Their Successors' Beliefs in Persian Context

ABSTRACT: *What distinguishes the Old Mongols is their devotion to and love of Nature, the far-reaching scope of their spiritual awareness, unending mental curiosity and nearly limitless endurance, and quest for excellence in every endeavor. Since Genghis Khan is the founder of the Mongol nation, we use his name as a starting point, and see where we get if we try to compare the qualities of water with those of the Genghis-Khanite Mongols. Afterwards, we shall look more closely on their thoughts and beliefs. Hence, the Mongolian taboos, rules of restrictions, and unwritten law are traditions inherited not only from our ancestors, but also from the teachings of Genghis Khan, contained in the Code of Law of Great Mongolia called "Ikh Zasag", home to customs and traditions of the Mongolian tribes and nationalities. In the present paper, the author aims to clarify what code of conducts and principals did Mongols adhere themselves to and how they reacted in the face of new religions. We will shed light on Mongol's unique respect to other religions and schools. Peerless freedom of religions prevailing in Mongol Empire will surprisingly shock those readers who had always visualized a savage and bloodthirsty picture of Mongols in their minds. The author will also survey their conversion to different religions and how these new systems affected their outlooks. Spiritual path of Mongols is the subject with which the reader will immediately acquaint himself. He/she will also shed light on the significance of symbolism in old Mongolia and their philosophical perspectives.*

KEY WORDS: *Old Mongols, Genghis Khan, code of law, devotion to and love of nature, spiritual path of Mongols, and philosophical perspectives.*

INTRODUCTION

What distinguishes the Old Mongols is their devotion to and love of Nature, the far-reaching scope of their spiritual awareness, unending mental curiosity and nearly limitless endurance, and quest for excellence in every endeavor (May, 2012:477). Since Genghis Khan is the founder of the Mongol nation, we use his name as a starting point, and see where we get if we try to compare the qualities of water with those of the Genghis-Khanite Mongols. Afterwards, we shall look more closely on their thoughts and beliefs.

The meaning of "Genghis" is something like "large body of water", "ocean", or "huge quantities of water" (May, 2012:477). Considering what we know about the symbolism and spiritual universe of the Old Mongols, it seems probable that Temuchin chose to call himself by that name on the

ground that the water is the strongest; the only unconquerable, but, at the same time, the most changeable and also the softest of all substances (Bafghi, 2006). Its peaceful, harmonic, imperturbable stillness can in a moment change into a frenzied daemon of waves shattering to pieces everything standing in its way, this is characteristically accomplished by the water's utilizing the forces existing in its environment.

The water is also capable of showing unyielding hardness; even the strongest person will be beaten to death by a single blow when falling onto the surface of water from a height of 15 meters (May, 2012:486). In the next second, it shows a new quality: if one grabs a sword or an axe to beat the water, it will softly, easily, and graciously withdraw; the water cannot be beaten. Immediately, when the sword is removed, the water is

unscathed. You can burn water, then, it will only temporarily evaporate, and thereupon infallibly return. If one tries to push away or shut out the water, it will soon find a new path and there break every resistance with multiplied force. The water can withdraw, evade, disappear, but always, indefatigably, it returns again and again.

Nobody and nothing can for long shut out or hinder the water; with fleeting irresistibility it circumvents the difficult areas, then it ingeniously, imperceptibly, penetrates even the minutest openings. Thereupon, its changeability and flexibility enables it to utilize fluctuations in temperature to change its form and even molecular density, and thus break up and shatter everything that tries to oppose it. Water dripping down on the hardest rock will in the course of millennia relentlessly hollow out and pierce it. Through endlessly slow, but mercilessly patient to catalyze corrosion, it penetrates and dissolves even the strongest steel. Water, different from all other substances, cannot be locked in but is itself able to surround and envelop, it cannot be beaten but can retaliate with deadly blows. If the water swallows you, death is unavoidable.

The water is, thus, invulnerable and ubiquitous; it unites within itself all opposing qualities, hence, it is not limited by any of them. In this way, it possesses incomparable flexibility, softness, and hardness without rigidity, it can therefore anywhere, anytime, adapt itself to any new circumstance, then, in a split-second completely unexpected take on a new quality. Chances are that Genghis Khan called himself "chingis" for the very reason that he wanted himself and his people to adopt and use the unique qualities of water in their actions (Bafghi, 2006:344).

And the people of Temuchin did indeed combine them all in a way hitherto unknown. In the battlefield, they did not meet hard force with rigid resistance; when Western armies fought the Mongols, they never answered the attack with rigid force; instead, they yielded softly, like the smooth, fleeting, and dancing movements of a wave, precisely in a "watery" way (Joveini, 2006).

The Western ideal of manfulness with forced courage, outer demonstrations of rigid but ephemeral and false strength, was not shared by the people of Genghis Khan; they let their opponents deplete their energy in futile show-offs and fierce, disorganized charges while the Mongols with an almost playful ease followed their opponents' movements in every detail, intuitively they without fail knew in advance what their opponent was going to do next, they absorbed and evaded every attempt of attack with a nimbleness and surefootedness bordering on the impossible (Hamedani, 1996:198). Ordinary human limitations did not apply to the Mongols. When time was right, they would envelop their doomed prey, exhaust him and "drown" him. Exactly in the same way, as the water would envelop and slowly obliterate what it has trapped, the Mongols operated in the same manner (Bafghi, 2006:344).

This extraordinary intuitive adaptability, flexibility, and eerie perspicacity permeated their whole nature, all their thought and actions. All this tells us what water represents; simultaneous strength and softness, and it possesses indefatigable, invincible strength because it possesses its sensitive, adaptable softness. The insight in this is a main constituent of the secret of the Mongols (Joveini, 2006).

THE OLD MONGOL PHILOSOPHY AND GENGHIS KHAN'S LEGACY

Regarding their religious beliefs: the Old Mongols have a distinct cosmology, which will here be outlined from their own point of view. It is up to us whether or not to actually accept their outlook; the point is that it merits inclusion here, since it was all-important in their spiritual universe.

As Genghis Khan united the Mongol tribes and waged war on most of Asia, he became known as one of the most ruthless and brutal warlords of all time. However, one hallmark during his military conquest was his tolerance of all religions. He embraced diversity and decreed religious freedom for everyone (Howorth, 1965:357). Genghis Khan's tolerance proved to be beneficial for him. As

European princes expelled some of their most skilled non-Christian subjects, the Mongols welcomed these beneficial others, blind to religion (Joveini, 2006). Genghis Khan continued to use religious persecution to his benefit. He would use suppressed people as spies in cities such as Baghdad and then take the land assimilating all those willing (Ebn-e Khavand, 1960). After a failed assassination attempt, Genghis Khan and 20 of his men fled and nearly starved to death. While on the run these men swore allegiance to one another and remarkably these men included Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and animists who worshiped the Eternal Blue Sky and the God Mountain of Burkhan Khaldun (Joveini, 2006).

When Muslim envoys came from central Asia to seek Genghis Khan's protection from the religious persecution, they faced under their Christian Khan Guchlug, Genghis Khan was happy to help. He led a campaign into Balasagun and killed Guchlug and declared religious freedom in all his lands (Shabankareh, 1984:190). This earned Genghis Khan the title as "*defender of religions*" and it was even said he was "*one of the mercies of the Lord and one of the bounties of his divine grace*" (cited in Bafghi, 2006:163).

Genghis Khan himself believed in no religion and for him, Islam, Christianity, and idolatry were equally respected. As you will see subsequently, his offspring too converted to different religions (Hamedani, 1996). The Ilkhanate, Golden Horde, and the Chagatai Khanate – three of the four principal Khanates – embraced Islam, as the Mongol elite favored Islam over other religions (Joveini, 2006). Non-Muslim Mongols also employed many Muslims in various fields and increasingly took their advice in administrative affairs. For example, Genghis Khan's advisor, Mahmud Yalavach, and Kublai Khan's financial minister, Ahmad Fanakati, were Muslims (Hamedani, 1996:249).

As they were well educated and knew Turkish and Mongolian, Muslims became a favored class of officials with notable Mongol converts to Islam, including Mubarak Shah and Tarmashirin of the Chagatai Khanate, Tuda Mengu, and Negudar of the Golden Horde,

Ghazan, and Öljaitü of the Ilkhanate (Joveini, 2006). Berke, who ruled Golden Horde from 1257 to 1266, was the first Muslim leader of any Mongol Khanates. Ghazan was the first Muslim Khan to adopt Islam as national religion of Ilkhanate, followed by Uzbek of the Golden Horde who urged his subjects to accept the religion as well (Ebn-e Khavand, 1960). Ghazan continued his non-Muslim forefathers' approach toward religious tolerance. When Ghazan learned that some Buddhism monks feigned conversion to Islam due to their temples being earlier destroyed, he granted permission to all who wish to return to Tibet where they can freely follow their faith and be among other Buddhists (Shabankareh, 1984:211).

Though Christianity never achieved a great position in the Mongol Empire, many Great Khans and lesser leaders were raised by Christian mothers and educated by Christian tutors (Ebn-e Khavand, 1960). Some of the major Christian figures among the Mongols were: Sorghaghtani Beki, daughter in law of Genghis Khan, and mother of the Great Khans Möngke, Kublai, Hulagu, and Ariq Boke; Sartaq, Khan of Golden Horde; Doquz Khatun, the mother of the ruler Abaqa; and Kitbuqa, general of Mongol forces in the Levant, who fought in alliance with Christians (Shabankareh, 1984:70). Marital alliances with Western powers also occurred, as in the 1265 marriage of Maria Palaiologina, daughter of Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, with Abaqa. Tokhta, Oljeitu, and Ozbeg had Greek Khatuns as well. The Mongol Empire contained the lands of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Caucasus and Russia, the Apostolic church in Armenia and the Assyrian Church of Nestorians in Central Asia and Persia (Shabankareh, 1984:70).

Ogedei's son and Guyuk's younger brother, Khoten, became the governor of Ningxia and Gansu. He launched a military campaign into Tibet under the command of Generals Lichi and Dhordha, and the marauding Mongols burned down Tibetan monuments such as the Reting monastery and the Gyal temple in 1240. Prince Kötön was convinced that no power in the world exceeded the might of the Mongols.

However, he also believed that religion was necessary in the interests of the next life. Thus, he invited Sakya Pandita to his *ordo*. Prince Kötön was impressed and healed by Sakya Pandita's teachings and knowledge, and later became the first known Buddhist prince of Mongol empire (Bafghi, 2006:221).

According to Old Mongol philosophy, the Universe only apparently consists of separate entities functionally independent of all other parts. Interdependence and interconnectedness were a tangible matter of fact for the Mongols (Spuler, 1996:45). This perception is perhaps not too original, but the Mongols went further: They knew that Cosmos is built upon principles that in turn are the fundamentals of their countless manifestations. Every part of the Cosmos is, therefore, a microcosm in an indefinite series, meaning that every component carries within it a blueprint of all other constituents of an intrinsically inseparable whole, as a consequence they together constitute an interconnected web resembling a giant hologram (Shabankareh, 1984:70). Because of this *hologrammatic* organization, the uninhibited, intuitive mind has the opportunity to derive limitless knowledge from careful observation of a small number of phenomena, as every segment or facet informs simultaneously about all of them (Hamedani, 1996).

Herein is found the source of the fundamental dictum of the mystic, saying that all possible answers we carry within ourselves, "Know thyself". To endeavor to perceive and interpret this information accessible to us is to develop consciousness and comprehension on a Cosmic scale. We now spot an important clue to the secret of the Mongols, as they possessed an ability to tap into hidden powers in Universe by way of utilization of esoteric wisdom largely unacknowledged in the monotheistic West.

Interestingly, the Mongols at the time of Genghis Khan did not believe in any personal God endowed with human characteristics (Shabankareh, 1984). But they believed in destiny or fate, and were convinced that Universe is governed by an omnipresent, all-

pervading reality that necessarily constitutes the ultimate prerequisite to the existence of observable as well as non-observable phenomena (Bayani, 2001:112). It is often asserted that their concept of *Koeke Moengke Tengri* (the Eternal Blue Heaven) was a deity resembling the personified Western God-idea. It was not so (Bayani, 2001:114). Eternal Blue Heaven is at one and the same time a conscious entity and a representation of the eternity of Universe itself, and as such is a pantheistic symbol of the all-encompassing nature of the ultimate Cosmic laws and forces, which constitute the Mongolian concept of God (Ebn-e Khavand, 1960). However, this idea is quite different from a belief in One God. For the Mongols, the One-God concept is an incorrect one, and rightfully so.

The Universe is filled with countless lesser and greater spirits, each with their own area of "jurisdiction". As so-called dead things are not dead, but have their spiritual energy, and energy is life, a lake, a forest, a river, a mountain, and earth herself has a spirit. The corollary of this is of course that the All, or the Ultimate Cosmos, if our mind can grasp such a thing, must have a ruling spirit, too, which like in monotheistic religions is seen as the source of everything. This is significantly different from monotheism, since the supreme spirit is only the Ultimate in a limitless series of forces, each with its own purpose and principle (Ratchnevsky ed., 1993:457).

The origins of these forces are various. Bearing in mind that our habitual differentiation between non-living and living is artificial and fictitious, we should perceive the presence of life principle in everything, albeit not necessarily in the shell of a physical manifestation (Bayani, 2001:112). People (and animals) who have lived on the physical plane do not disappear after their death, they only lose their physical shell. Their consciousness, intelligence, and presence is still a reality. Likewise, albeit less obvious to many is the fact that beings and places in nature, like a tree or lake have their sustaining spirits. The Mongols were pantheists; Pantheism is correct, the Universe *is* Pantheistic in its very nature, filled with spirits. Because of the lack of ordinary

physical contact, it is however not easy to establish communication with these forces. That requires the practice of Shamanistic techniques and procedures (Shabankareh, 1984).

SHAMANISM, MONOTHEISM, AND SECRET HISTORY OF MONGOLS

Shamanism is an integral part of the religious universe of the Mongols (Ebn-e Khavand, 1960). Shamans, with their ritual activities, are intermediaries between the forces/gods/spirits and us, they interpret their messages to people, and are healers in many respects (Spuler, 1996:122). It has often been stated that Shamanism represents a less advanced way of orientation towards existence. Such is not the case. A society, in which Shamanic activities are common, is also a society that acknowledges the fact that we are living in a living world, where countless unseen but present and influential forces exist together with us. Shamanism is the cultural expression of the insight in this. In the Mongolian world-view, it is up to those so inclined to seek this insight, and cooperate with the very real forces that co-exist with us (Bayani, 2001:302).

Reincarnation was and is a matter of course to the Mongols, and crucial to the Mongolian spiritual universe (Teseff, 1986:101). The principle of transmigration of the soul is a further confirmation that we are the sole responsible creators of our destiny, on the collective as well as the individual level (Teseff, 1986:103). This principle is something Monotheism wants to deny, because the mature insight that we create our own destiny and rebuilds our Path during every second removes the human psychological conditions that have given rise to monotheistic ideas (Hamedani, 1996:249). Instead, we win faith in our capacity to harmonize with the workings of Universe and truly create our own destiny.

Monotheism, then, is in reality the least advanced worldview. By its sterile philosophical reductionism, it prevents its adherents from becoming conscious of the much more complex principles at work in

Cosmos (Spuler, 1996:236). In Monotheism, the axiom dictates that "God" created Man in His picture. It is not so, it is the other way around. There is however no difficulty in understanding how monotheistic beliefs have come to exert their great appeal. A patriarchal, caring and protecting Father "up there", is a comforting thought but very deceptive. We should free ourselves from the chains of that psychological fixation, and instead realize that we, with every reason and right, must take our destiny in our own hands, and cooperate with the living spirits that live among and with us. If we do so, great power is available to us. The Mongol people are a prime example of this (Howorth, 1965:342).

It was not until the advent of Genghis Khan that the Mongols collectively drew together their combined human, that is their physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual resources to establish the largest world empire. The world has ever seen and accomplished the great task to realize the potentials of contact between the parts of the world. The Mongol Empire, stretching from the Pacific to the Baltic and including the great Moslem states of Asia, comprised (Hamedani, 1996:249). It is possible to discern in the life work of Temuchin and his Mongols, the undertaking of knitting the worlds of East and West together, which means establishing and broadening human contact, dialogue, fraternization, and ultimately the establishment of the conscious brotherhood of all people, a unity in the diversity which the Great Mongol always honored and encouraged (Howorth, 1965:333). The history of the Mongols is a prime example of the principle that as long as our actions are in harmony with the larger forces, they will be endorsed by Eternal Heaven, as Genghis Khan himself would have put it (Teseff, 1986:162).

Among the many admirable traits we find in the 13th century, Mongols is a rare ability to live not against Nature, but in and with her in a cooperative way. This part of their legacy is something we must take a closer look at (Man, 2004:717). Chances are, we humans will have to develop our societies in such a way, that we avoid over-urbanization and alienation from

our environment. We need to learn, that is re-learn, to harmonize with the principles of our Mother Earth. Also in this respect, the Mongols have something precious to teach and give us.

As mentioned elsewhere, in the physical and spiritual origins of the Mongols, there is a preponderance of elements from the Taiga regions of Siberia. It is characteristic of people who have come from the forests to feel a high degree of reverence for Nature. This is to be explained by the intrinsic meaning of the forest, or so to speak, the soul of the forest, and its effect upon people who live in this environment. The forest is a place where green plants, herbs, and trees grow up from Mother Earth, symbolizing and representing healing, growth, and regeneration. Wildlife is sheltered by the protective, motherly presence of the forest goddesses. Invariably, within ancient cultures around the world, the forest is seen as feminine, protective and motherly, and people who have strong connections to the forest region tend to venerate these aspects of Nature in a very high degree. Such a setup creates a culture that is predisposed towards a profound reverence for and a protective "mothering" approach towards biological life and its countless interrelated and forever interdependent ecosystems (Ratchnevsky ed., 1993:468).

As will be understood, this closeness to Nature is characteristic of every natural people, thus, the Mongols certainly were and are marked by it. In the words of the Danish traveller, Henning Haslund-Christensen, "*The Mongol does not count any spot of Earth his own, because everything is the property of Heaven*". This attitude bespeaks an awareness of the inviolable interconnectedness in Universe, a humbly pantheistic approach vastly different from the modern Western one, wherein conquest of and control over Nature has been the proclaimed aim, with less than fortunate results (cited in Man, 2004:714). The consequences of human disunion from Earth have become increasingly visible in the modern world, and there is a growing general consensus that life on Tellus is imperiled by human trespasses upon this living entity.

Instead of separating ourselves from life, we must instead be able to consciously choose to be part of Nature and enjoy it in cooperation, harmony, and love. Speaking of the Earth forces in this context, since the world is presently in acute need of regeneration, it follows that a renewed emphasis on them is needed to alleviate and heal the many societal ills and environmental crises brought about by inconsideration for the very fundament of life, which according to the Old Siberians and Mongols as well as every natural people is the Earth Mother, in the West often referred to by her Greek name *Gaea*, from whom all earthly living things spring (Ratchnevsky, 1993:269). In this worldview, the totality of all diverse forms of life on our planet is considered a precious entity whose well-being must not be disturbed by its human inhabitants.

It merits mention that a lot of modern people in Western societies are likely to balk at this disclosure of a powerful Mongolian attachment to the female principles dominant in the regions of North, the Siberian dark and cold Tundra and Taiga, whence the Mongols originated. Understandably, the impression that the Mongols were ultra-masculinity people has been created by their being so redoubtable warriors, as masculine aspects have in much of popular belief become closely associated with violence. This has obfuscated and set up barriers to an understanding of the Mongols and their spiritual nature.

Two moments must be brought forward in this context: Firstly, it is a relatively recent and mistaken belief that masculine principles act in most respects violently, and are the only capable of destruction, whereas feminine principles represent absolute goodness. One only need to recall the fierce rancor and violence shown by the supremely female, albeit not exactly delicate epiphanies of Kali and Lilith to realize this and understand the infinite complexity behind habitually simplified good/evil dichotomies. Further, according to Asian and Mongolian spiritual lore, the feminine principle is the most merciless one, due to its intuitive flexibility, which imparts invincibility.

Secondly, we ought to understand that what gave the Mongols, the advantage over their contemporaries, were precisely the Mongolian sensitive intuition, their flexible mentality, and concomitant practical adaptability in all their undertakings. This made them superior to the more purely masculine, and hence less intuitive, Turkic and Persian peoples in the Southern areas of Asia, to say nothing about their adversaries in the West (Howorth, 1965:101).

Western common notions of the intrinsic meanings of the masculine and feminine principles are often way too simplified to encompass their full significance (Ratchnevsky, 1993:31). It will be the most precise approach to interpret the female and male forces in terms of complementarities, each of which capable of acting out countless different behaviors and propelling equally countless results and outcomes, but then always in accordance with their archetypal mode of operation. It is not a question of good and evil, but rather of different ways and, one might say, formulas. In the human realm as in Universe at large, initiatory action is as indispensable as reception, tenderness is as necessary as vehemence, feeling is as important as thinking (Man, 2004:701). Typically, these tendencies order themselves in feminine and masculine modes of behavior and expression.

It is salutary to bear in mind that they are complementary and need to come together and find an equipoise. If they are divorced, what has for many centuries been the case in the Western world of mental rationalism, the resultant imbalance leads to severely detrimental effects. Together in union, these two principles lead to conception that is the birth of new life. The significant point being conveyed here is that even though the Mongols evince an undying dedication to excellence and achievement which at least partially can be ascribed to impetus from masculine forces, they simultaneously carry within them, their Siberian heritage which is the fundament of their work and purpose in this world (Howorth, 1965:212).

Accordingly, the *Secret History of the Mongols* unequivocally places the origin of the wolf and the deer; the mythical ancestors of all Mongols, in the deep, cold, and dark forests of Siberia. Also, this couple consists of one very female deer and the male, but intrinsically feminine wolf. This, together with their strong forest tradition, tells us that the Mongol element is well equipped to provide a spiritual basis for a healthy benevolent and considerate approach to Nature and ourselves, since invaluable elements that have for centuries been missing from human communities in large parts of the world are prominent in the Mongolian spiritual heritage. Here is something to delve into for all those who pay interest in, feel sympathy for, or have a connection to the Mongols.

THE MODERN WORLD: BETWEEN RATIONAL AND INTUITIVE MIND

Philosophically, we may elaborate further upon the above mentioned split between our mental and intuitive faculties and subsequent over-emphasis on the rational, which in many human cultures and communities has led to an emotional distance from the animate natural surroundings that living beings are supposed to inhabit and harmonize with. This estrangement from Nature has been apparent in human history, since the divorce between the rational and the intuitive mind gradually took place in the Western world during the 1600's, with the ascendancy of rationalistic philosophical thought whose foremost proponents are perhaps Descartes and Bacon (Howorth, 1965:661).

This tradition professed to guide mankind towards domination over Nature, and its premises sprang out from a purified rational thinking from which intuitive experience, non-mental perception, and age-old spiritual insights and wisdom had been intentionally purged. This attitude was now increasingly hailed as the only proper human state of mind. Consistently, the intuitive and emotional experience, that sentience which is the true hallmark of all living beings, now became relegated to an inferior position and considered unsound and "irrational".

Unfortunately, this outlook signified a jeopardous split between our intuitive and emotional sides on one side, and our mental and rational faculties on the other. Without collaboration between these two, either side will prove destructive in its isolated form. Abundant corroboration of this has been provided throughout history, and as a very strong accentuation of the rational mind implies imbalance in favor of masculine principles, it follows that the antidote is an increase of influence from the feminine element. That would lead to the acquisition of a sensible ecological ethics, spawning a greater willingness to listen to Nature and Mother Earth instead of imposing human will upon her.

To put it into other words, we need to cooperate with Universe, instead of constantly being in the position of trying to conquer Nature. This realization has as could be expected found its philosophical expressions. Evolutionary biology has demonstrated that the formation of organisms and species in the juvenile universe, historically, involves even more intricate mechanisms than earlier imagined. Thus, some have tried to arrive at moral norms or even derive political lessons from these natural phenomena. Notably the American Lynn Margulis has, from her standpoint of being a professional geneticist specializing in the evolution of organisms, advanced the view that symbiotic mechanisms, rather than the working of natural selection by competition, are the major factors that induce growth and development in life forms. This, she does by substantiating that cell organelles of eukaryotes (nucleated cells) originally originated by reciprocal exchange of the genomes of two different types of bacteria, something which shows the existence of an evolutionary mechanism, often called *symbiogenesis*, whereby genetic material from one organism can be combined with and incorporated into another, and give rise to a wholly new, third organism. Around this, she then puts together a line of argument in which she dismisses the significance and working of the competitive elements in Universe (cited in Man, 2004:701).

She and other workers in the field should be credited for their work to elucidate the important fact that mechanisms as mutation, competition, and selection is but one aspect of the workings and principles guiding all life. At the same time, there is always a ditch on either side of the road. No ethical values can justifiably be ascribed to the categories "symbiosis" and "competition", and neither the adherents of the so-called "Social Darwinism" nor the extreme egalitarianism hit their mark, since both ideological positions fail to comprehend the true complexity of Nature and its meaning and function (cited in Howorth, 1965:248).

Moreover, both cooperation and competition are indeed present and performing a function in Universe. They are meant to co-exist and cooperate, and we are well advised to bear in mind that our linguistic categories fail to fully cover the subtleties involved here. To infer that one mechanism is more fruitful or important than the other is both unscientific, unreasonable, and outright wrong when both are functional necessities. Moreover, "cooperation" is the underlying theme that encompasses also every past, present, and future instance of what we call "competition". Otherwise, Cosmos could not have come from Chaos, let alone be maintained. In reality, cooperation *and* competition has occurred and occurs every second in time. Selective and competitive mechanisms and principles are incessantly at work together with cooperative ones everywhere in Universe, and they are so at the *very same time* (Weatherford, 2004:421).

It is the human proclivity towards the construction of dichotomies that deceives many into believing in a mutually exclusive nature of the typical modes of behavior described by the linguistic categories "cooperation" and "competition". Polarities and apparent contradictions are far from evil manifestations, they are fruitful reflections of the grand principle of complementarity. Realizing this, we should be wary of creating new fallacies and fixations in place of old ones, because such obfuscation always impedes our

understanding of the Universe (Weatherford, 2004:123).

Regarding the above mentioned discoveries, they more than anything, beautifully proves the co-existence of both complementarities. Even if organisms have originally emerged from the fusion of bacteria, this does not invalidate or negate competition, quite the contrary. Firstly, because subsequent evolution of organisms involved natural selection and competition, and much more significantly, because the very first encounter between two participants in any union must imply a selection, and this, even if we assume it to be mysteriously premeditated by an Universal Consciousness, necessarily entailing the competitive exclusion of other potential symbiotic partners. Rather than contradicting the competitive element in Universe, the discoveries of evolutionary biology have given it a more solid standing, by albeit perhaps unwittingly making clear that mutation and sexual reproduction are by no means prerequisites to competition (Weatherford, 2004).

The symbiotic combination of two organisms must greatly have enhanced their chances of competitive success against other competing life forms, so this symbiotic action can equally well be seen as more akin to the formation of alliances in a victorious war than anything else. Additionally, in the same way as 99% of all species that ever appeared on Earth have gone physically extinct as a result of their being outcompeted in selective processes, innumerable attempts at symbiosis must have miscarried, and led to the demise of one or both partners. Even in the instances where symbiosis proved successful, the first moment of symbiosis must have been characterized by all the eventful symptoms of one organism invading another, with much initial havoc and destruction as a result before balance or equilibrium is established between what, through trial and error, eventually came out as the most successful arrangement, whether the outcome became a symbiosis, an annihilation of one of the parties, or a fruitful equilibrium between the two organisms.

More often than not, the third alternative, which could upon a closer and more profound look actually be called "cooperation from a distance", or perhaps equally fitting "competition from a distance" applied (Saunders, 2001:536). Thus, we see how the different principles, that also reflect themselves in human wars and in friendly societal organization alike, are mirrored even at the microscopic level in the universe. This affirms the correctness of the Old Mongolian world-view in which the Principles permeating all of Universe influence and govern all its constituents, from the smallest organism to the largest galaxies (Saunders, 2001).

In conclusion, it has been incontrovertibly shown that even on the molecular level, the most fierce competition exists but that it nevertheless, has a genuine fundament of cooperation. Both are indeed quintessential to Universe, which means that the prejudiced concentration on one facet to the exclusion of another, has its root in illusions of the human mind. Hence, old and traditional dichotomies are entirely unwarranted and should be discarded (Weatherford, 2004:198).

THE BEAUTY OF CLOSENESS TO NATURE

Positively, the most fruitful approach to this question is to endeavor to maintain a balance of the separate yet complementary and, thus, cooperating forces in our philosophical, social and political systems, something that would free us from illusions of our separation from Nature and also dispel our axioms of a human "right" to trespass too heavily upon our living environment and our own human nature. Because we have no right to violate our Mother Nature. Our birthright and natural inclination would be to harmonize with her. This insight should also be accepted by common denominator for all those who feel responsibility towards life.

It is incontrovertible that after the breakthrough of Cartesian dualistic philosophy and the scientific discoveries of the Newtonian period, humanity inclined towards the wildly preposterous aim of conquering Mother Earth herself (Ratchnevsky, 1993:331).

Although human as well as natural history tends to be one of punctuated equilibrium, such a manner of thinking is entirely unjustifiable. It is senseless and above all destructive to use our intellectual abilities and scientific artifacts in the service of short-sighted desires of greedy exploitation, megalomania delusions of omnipotence, and separation from Nature. Feminine forces of nature are capable of counterbalancing this type of mentality, and must be invited to do so.

At the same time, a vigorous, healthy life-force marked by a yearning towards excellence, a quality by which the Old Mongols are distinguished, is a virtuous component of existence that should be included in our ideals. It devolves upon humanity as our obligation to find our place in a balanced and harmonious relationship with the living world wherein we are partakers, all the more so because our high intelligence implies greater accountability for our actions and priorities. A profound reverence for Mother Earth in all her aspects is a prerequisite to responsible living, and this is what humanity, across all cultures, should reestablish (Ratchnevsky, 1993). Because we are animate beings, we instinctively know about our belonging to the living world of Nature. Man, therefore, has the opportunity to experience how wonderful and satisfying it is to live in concert with her, provided that we truly listen to the subtle voices that call us towards life.

It has for long been almost universally acknowledged that pollution of the earth, water, and air of the planet's biosphere presents a danger of the highest magnitude. Nearly equally widespread is the realization that deforestation, the erosion brought about by modern, intensive methods of agriculture, and overpopulation are other expressions of something being tragically and alarmingly wrong. This overpopulation has seldom been understood for what it is, that is something that bespeaks the lamentable anthropocentrism from which many human cultures have suffered for long (Weatherford, 2004:110).

However, the reasons why Mankind has for so long tolerated these symptoms of human distance from the living world to which we intrinsically belong, run deep. This long-lasting acceptance of Homo Sapiens' contamination, overpopulation and frequently destructive activity on Earth stems mainly from a lifestyle in which people are prevented from living in natural settings. In truth, if humans are to become spiritually aware of our connection to Nature and Mother Earth, it is necessary to adopt a lifestyle different from the urbanized one that large numbers of people have been pressed into ever since the Industrial Revolution (Ratchnevsky ed., 1993:341).

To live in man-made megacities removes people from the all-important direct contact with natural surroundings. This in turn leads to alienation from the true, pulsating life in ourselves and in the environment. As a consequence, the environment as well as the human body itself will be reduced and degenerate unless another path is consciously chosen (Weatherford, 2004:45). It is a dangerous psychological process that deprives humans of the deep feeling of belonging to and togetherness with the living natural world. The only solution is to consciously seek the beauty of closeness to Nature, in our surroundings, in our political priorities and practical actions, in our souls. In other words: We must use our intuition for guidance in our lives.

Moreover, it is not only the physical nature of humans that is in danger of degeneration in a lifestyle which is shielded and distanced from Nature (Howorth, 1965:66). As a matter of fact, the human intelligence itself is the product of all the rivalry, competition, and necessity of responding to the often dangerous challenges in nature. Therefore, to reject nature on account of her alleged "cruelty" is not merely a gross misunderstanding, it means to repudiate our own origin and the prerequisites to the development and maintenance of excellent qualities.

Peace, in its most extreme expression of physical, mental and psychological

sedentariness, means motionlessness, stagnation, decay and finally death. Only resistance and challenge, from our environment as well as from our competitors, can foster development and true excellence (Howorth, 1965). Competition, rivalry, cooperation and solidarity are in equal degree the results of that resistance, all imposed by necessity. Altruism and compassion are inborn, instinctive qualities crucial to survival and well-being, as is the competitive urge (Weatherford, 2004:20).

Back in the 1200's, the Mongols already had formulated an explicit criticism of the detrimental effects of civilized life, a stand that would be a thousand times more relevant in our era (Weatherford, 2004:200). Let there be no doubt that the feminine aspects of Earth are a main repository of much-needed powers of healing, growth, and renewal. Let us try if we can see, revere and absorb the female forces of Siberia and let them assist us in our own path towards development of global, nay, universal consciousness, environmental awareness as well as the inter-human compassion and intuitive responsibility required to keep in our collective mind the understanding that we are part of Nature, that we are all children of the Great Mother Earth, whose manifestation in Mongolian is *Etugen-eke*.

A crucial element in this understanding is our realization that Nature is not "cruel". Due to human desire for comfort, many members of the species *homo sapiens* have come to believe that cruelty is a "natural" thing (Saunders, 2001:512). This distorted picture is then contrasted with the so-called "human" values. In fact, in wide circles "human" has become a customary synonym for everything "good", whereas only humans can be genuinely cruel and devastating, what is evidenced by human destruction of the environment as well as of the human body itself. In all probability, the notion that humans ought to remove themselves from Nature stems from a genetically coded inclination to save energy (Howorth, 1965:37). When our forebears lived in a harsh environment, it was necessary to be

very economical with the use of our resources, and rest and save energy when possible (Saunders, 2001:501).

Then, during the historical period when humans developed societies wherein they removed the immediate and visible need for strenuous activity, they continued to seek comfort. Under these new conditions, this desire for comfort becomes not a wise strategy for energy conservation, but rather a destructive search for passivity, which leads to degeneration for those humans who fail to develop a lifestyle in which a sufficient element of powerful intensity in all respects is maintained and developed (Howorth, 1965:36). Here an interesting side of the human intellect is being expressed: Frequently the repudiation of Nature is given elaborate mental and theoretical justification, and whole anthropocentric systems of thought have been built up to rationalize and defend ideas which carry what is a *de facto* contempt for the very same Nature we are a part of.

It is of the utmost importance to comprehend these mechanisms, and to understand the necessity of harmonizing with Nature. In this context, we must likewise bear in mind that this healthy condition entails the strong presence of a large number of components, facets, and qualities that by some thought systems and fashions that have emerged in modern human societies unfortunately have come to be regarded "unpleasant" or outright "brutal" and "primitive", but which are actually the building blocks of life itself (Weatherford, 2004:116).

We need to ask these questions without urban prejudices: Do so many humans really have to live in sedentary societies like cities and megacities? Do humans have a universal right to modify vast areas of the world into man-made cultures where the humans reign alone at the expense of all other life forms? Does the world belong to what we call humanity? Could it be that a life in an overpopulated, wholly human-made and -dominated environment characterized by technology taking over a considerable number of practical or worse biological functions, if

unchecked deprives us of abilities that enhances and indeed are prerequisites to a pulsating, intense life? Could it be that would create a richer and happier existence for us as well as for other forms of life by instead striving to combine the realm of science and technology with our "primitive" animal qualities and abilities?

It may be to our advantage to discard the urbane, sedentary lifestyle, and move forward to a rural life wherein the demands and requirements of an active way of life under more "natural" conditions determine the evolution and formation of our characteristics. This will ensure future development and retaining of animal abilities which make life intense and joyous. Moreover, it would also set us in a position where we intuitively sense that our genuine home is not above or beyond, but in Nature.

Naturally, the knowledge that all cells with nuclei – *eukaryotes* – and the life forms they have built, have sprung from bacteria and thus are indeed our first ancestors, is instrumental in teaching us that humans like all other life forms are forever part of Nature and ought not to try to put ourselves in a position outside it, whether in the way we treat the ecosystems or in our lifestyle. One very deep implication of the insight that the ancestors of all "advanced" life forms are "simple" bacteria, is of course that many of the ideas humans have nurtured throughout history, ideas about human uniqueness, and alleged "right" to modify and mold Nature and ourselves in the picture of what are in reality misconceptions, should be discarded. Nature is neither cruel nor our enemy.

Above all, going against Nature in a short-sighted Pollyannaish enthusiasm, leading to hubris, over the products and technological innovations of the human mind, is both unwarranted and ruinous (Howorth, 1965:232). Therefore, humans need to respect the natural way in the way they think, behave, and live. In order for that to happen, it is necessary to discard many of the notions of human uniqueness and to seriously question the validity of anthropocentric philosophies that have tended to obscure and distort our

self-understanding, and to justify human irreverence for and estrangement from Mother Nature (Howorth, 1965).

Instead we need to realize that the animal phenomena, the joy of intensity, all the wonderful experiences, perceptions, and sensations that distinguish a living being are every bit as valuable and worthy of being sought and enjoyed by humans as what is often mistakenly being positively characterized as the "civilized" or "advanced" behaviors, qualities, circumstances, and conditions, or perhaps even much more so. It is our inalienable birthright to enjoy a lively, energetic animal life in all its intensity. Then, it is up to us to make that choice. Such a choice entails a more active lifestyle in which every kind of outdoor activity and spending as much time in rural areas as possible are important elements.

Who knows, it may be that if and when humans as a group thoroughly question the urbanized lifestyle and find out that a new and more "animal" way to live is the best one, it will also prove the most effective cure against societal ills like crime, violence, and a number of psychological disturbances that have long haunted modern Man (Howorth, 1965:466).

MONGOLIAN CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Mongolian customs and traditions are unique traditions formed during the development of central Asian nomadic civilization, which has been passed on from generation to generation of Mongols over the centuries. Mongolian customs and traditions encompassed all aspects of life: the intellect, psychology, morality, ethics, science, education, religious life, and family relationships of the Mongols (Allsen, 2004:532). Mongolian customs and traditions have their own peculiarities and specific features, the likes of which are distinguished from other nations, and have been recorded by both Mongolian and foreign scholars in their research.

Since the beginning of time, the Mongols considered the upbringing and education of their children in a civilized manner to be an obligation before the state and the people

(Allsen, 2004). This is why the linguistic association of the Mongolian word "*humuujil*" (educate, bring up) is related to the idea of "*humuun*" (human) or "*humuuniig hun bolgoh*" (to bring up, make up a man). Along with a healthy and normal physical upbringing, much attention was paid to the intellectual, moral, and ethical development of a child, even when unborn. Mongolian traditions strictly forbid frightening a pregnant woman, making her unhappy or employing her to do difficult jobs (Ratchnevsky ed., 1993:213).

Furthermore, it was forbidden to cross a pregnant woman when walking, to say bad words in her presence, to swear or even speak in a loud voice. *Such traditions* came from the deep respect and care given to an unborn child, who, it was considered, might become a genius, an esteemed and distinguished statesman, or just a dear and faithful person for his parents, relatives and community. The Mongol saying "*Holiig ni doroond, garyg ganzagand*" translates literally as "make the child's legs reach the stirrups and hands reach the saddle thongs" (Ratchnevsky ed., 1993). This means that the child must grow up physically able to help his parents and relatives with their daily activities.

Once the children could understand and accept their surroundings, they were told tales and legends, riddles and proverbs, and were taught to respect parents, siblings, old people and strangers. At the same time, parents carefully observed how their child accepted everything that was taught, monitored their behaviour, speech and actions, and supported and encouraged the good and condemned and criticized their wrong doings. In order to cultivate a child's knowledge and skills, the children were taught to tend and graze young animals, to water horses, to collect dry cattle dung, and to milk cows from a young age. The livestock breeders taught everything from their own experiences (Allsen, 2004:229).

As the right nutrition was important for healthy growth, along with sufficient milk and milk products, children were taught about the danger of over-eating or being hungry and of choking, in addition to good manners (Allsen, 2004). Particular attention was paid to

children's toys and games in order to make children smart, clever, intelligent, honest, and trustworthy; games and toys created and invented by the Mongols prove this. For example, playing horse racing with *shagai* (lamb's anklebone), guessing the sum of anklebones in one's hand, setting the so-called "*alag melkhii*" (multicoloured frog), bone shooting, and *shagai shuurekh*-game played with anklebones.

By entertaining their children with puzzle games and toys made of wood or metal, the Mongols used to teach them Mongolian traditions and customs which served to broaden their minds (Atwood, 2004:201). As the Mongols say, permanent scolding or rebuking of a child, or intimidation and threatening make a child perverse and stubborn, therefore a caring and loving education was considered particularly important. However, they said, excessive love and care made a child capricious and spoilt. Accordingly, Mongols have many proverbs such as "*Erkhiig surakhaar berkhiig sur*" (to be experienced instead of being spoiled). One of the established norms of behaviour of the Mongols was the tradition of greeting and saluting each other with respect and honour.

Elders, distinguished and honoured persons are greeted first and the young ones respond to them in well-wishing and respectable manner. Hand-shaking, while greeting each other, was not desirable, as the touching of hand of an honoured and respected person was considered impolite and a violation of tradition (Allsen, 2004:447). The ancestors did not consider the touching and grasping of hands a sign of affection and friendship but rather shameful behaviour and an attempt to make others dirty and impure. The most venerable greeting would involve a person tightly buttoning his clothes, tightening his belt, putting his hat on, extending his right hand while bowing three times and touching his forehead with his fingers.

This was considered the most popular and traditional style of greeting, and was conducted during ceremonies held in officials' palaces or at their homes. When meeting respected guests on the open steppe, one

should put his clothes in order, place the palm of his right hand to his heart and bow therefore displaying deep respect. Ordinary folk upon greeting each other, spoke words of well wishes regarding his or her occupation, the following words were pronounced: "*Sureg amgalan suu shim arvin boltugai*" or "Let the herd be peaceful and milk be in abundance". Upon meeting a person travelling to a faraway place the following was said: "*Altan shar zam tan' ulziitei boltugai*" or "Let your journey be lucky and successful". The greeting bestowed upon a person sewing was "*Uil uran uter turgen butekh boltugai*" or "Wish your needlecraft be elegant and completed quickly" (Allsen, 2004).

From ancient times, the Mongols deeply revered combining words of well-wishing with the words of greetings. The traditional ceremony of greeting during the *Tsagaan Sar* is performed once a year. The ceremony of greeting with a "*hadag*" (blue silk scarf) is a tradition inherited from ancient times (Atwood, 2004:275). It is strictly adhered to and is considered the highest and most revered form of greeting. If this were not followed, it would be considered disrespectful and be condemned. Upon greeting, young people stretch both hands towards the elders with palms up, the elders do the same with palms faced down, but the young people hold the elbows of the old people as if to support them. Greeting elders in this way could be performed with or without a *hadag*.

If the greeting is performed with a *hadag*, the open side of a triple folded *hadag* should face the elder or the receiver. If the person wants to kiss the youngster, the latter should bow his head and the elder kiss his forehead or cheek. This is not actually a kiss, as the elder only smells the young person. Kissing with lips is not desirable. A Mongolian taboo is considered like an unwritten law. The rules dictate the respect of people's relationships, respect of nature and environment, of the skies, outer space, of sun and moon and planets, of norms of behaviour, of traditions and education in human relationships. This

oral folk law has been strictly observed by the Mongols for centuries and has become a homemade discipline for the educating and upbringing of children. For example:

First, it is forbidden to look suspiciously at ones mother, father, grandparents, and familiar or unfamiliar elderly people (Foltz, 1999:701). The offending person would be treated as a man disregarding the law and considered worse than an animal;

Second, it is forbidden to throw waste into rivers, lakes and spas, the offender would be punished for spoiling the water – the source of all life;

Third, Mongols do not beat horses, dogs, and animals; it is equal to beating a close friend;

Fourth, it is strictly forbidden to throw burning ash from the stove as the burning ambers might come a fire and endanger the life of people and animals and damage the nature;

Fifth, it is forbidden to leave holes for rope and tether fastening unfilled with soil or stones (Foltz, 1999:711). The soil injured by a stake must be re-covered. Open holes may also injure the legs of animals;

Sixth, it would be considered shameful to urinate towards the setting or rising sun (Foltz, 1999:751). This way one respects the holiness of the sun, the rays of which shine and illuminate the whole world; and

Seventh, not feeding a guest is considered as a sign of ignorance and unfriendliness (Foltz, 1999:733). This person would be called greedy and stingy, who ignores the Mongolian tradition of hospitality. It is forbidden to be unfair or inhuman, to be arrogant and rude, which insults the reputation of the elders, of ancestors and of one's personal reputation.

The Mongols highly revere their reputation, which is evident from the proverbs "*Muu amidyavsnaas ner turtei sain ukh*" (Better to die with a good reputation than be alive with a bad one) and "*Ner khugarsnaas yas khugar n' deer*" (Better the bone be broken than one's reputation).

CONCLUSION ¹

The Mongolian taboos, rules of restrictions, and unwritten law are traditions inherited not only from our ancestors, but also from the teachings of Genghis Khan, contained in the Code of Law of Great Mongolia called "*Ikh Zasag*", home to customs and traditions of the Mongolian tribes and nationalities. The teachings of Genghis Khan, designed to inspire and preserve good management of family and society, deal repeatedly with traditions any Mongol should adhere to during his lifetime. For example, every human being should first of all, "correct one-self, then bring in order his own house and at the end, his state".

The sense in this teaching is that every person should grow up in a decent way (educated, just and fair, smart and energetic, etc), and be able to take care of his own home. A man successful in managing his own affairs, and in educating and bringing up his children, should be able to succeed in state affairs. Some of the astrological taboos still linger in modern society. For instance, the day and hour to embark on a trip, purchasing goods, starting a new business, even cutting hair are often subject to an astrologer's calculations.

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The Mongol People

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