

My Early Childhood

In accordance with the tradition at that time, the herdsman Gandan of the Ach Khariad clan of Dalai Choinkhor Van spent time studying the scriptures at the monastery temples and finally went out into the countryside to take charge of his family and livestock. He had three children whose names were Ad'yaakhüü, Bazar, and Togtokh.

The children lost their mother when Bazar was eight years old. They all lived with their father who died when Bazar was eighteen. Bazar's father, Gandan, had only a few yaks all of which ended up being handed over to pay taxes. From his early youth Bazar had tended other people's livestock and he was said to be a clean, handsome person. Because he had a tall nose, greenish eyes, and brownish hair, the local people nicknamed him "Russian Bazar."

From an early age Bazar was summoned time and again by various people to copy their accounts using Mongolian script. Eventually, even the banner seal office summoned him. After he completed all this clerical work, they called him "Bazar the Scribe." Due to his initial poverty, he was unable to progress to become a senior clerk, and later on left clerical work to take up livestock herding. When he was young he was quite good at singing long-songs.¹ He was also able to paint playing cards and dice, and he carved fancy dominoes out of birch wood. He hunted, prepared felt and leather, and repaired guns.

This was the way my father Bazar lived with my mother, Tserendulam.

My mother Tserendulam was the younger of the two daughters of the lone impoverished nun Bud who was the younger sister of quite a wealthy person called Mangal. My parents married and built a little ger. They owned two milking cows, a single gelding mount, and over ten sheep. They set up camp in winter on the slope of a hill at the mouth of a high ravine called Khudag. In spring they camped at a tiny stream which crossed the mouth of the ravine, or else in the valley of the Nükht river. In summer they would sometimes follow the mouth of that same Khudag valley, or crossing the so-called Tüleen Davaa, they entered a valley north of it where they camped at the Shar Khooloi river which emptied into Khökh Nuur. It was one of nature's most beautiful places. Several valleys came between the mountains, some were wooded, others bare, some high and some low.

On the eastern side of this valley there was a large body of water called Khökh Nuur, surrounded by beautiful forested mountains. Right in the middle of the lake were several islands. There were some small hills with tall trees on these islands. When the lake was freezing or thawing, it made a beautiful sound. They said it was a noise made by local gods but actually it was produced when the ice either broke or froze, making a grating noise comparable to the sound made by mountain trees. A local legend described

¹ *Urtyn duu*, "long songs", are a still popular genre of Mongolian traditional music.

how large water buffalo and dragon-like creatures lived in the lake. A great many geese, mandarin ducks, ducks and other similar birds lived in the lake. As the lake was salty, it supported no fish. Rivers flowed into the lake from Shar Valley, Khökh Valley and many other places. The mouths of the valleys surrounding the lake were well-watered and had good grass and other vegetation. Since it was a very cool and pleasant place to spend the summer, many households would set up their encampments in groups settled together or near each other. There were several hundred cattle, horses, and sheep pastured here, all owned by rich families.

In some camps where several families owned an average number of livestock, it was the custom for them to cooperate and take turns looking after the animals. A rich household with many livestock would establish a separate and self-supporting camp. The horse herders, shepherds, milk maids, and other servants would live together in the kind of camp my parents lived in. My father looked after the rich families' horses, sheared their sheep, beat the wool, made felt and chopped firewood. My mother milked their cows and helped with the housework. As far as payment was concerned, there was none really, apart from the provision of meals for the household. In the summer and autumn months, two people together could earn a brick of tea or one lamb in wages. On the other hand, when we migrated and made camp, the rich family helped with our transportation and provided mounts if any to-ing and fro-ing was required. We lived like this for many years.

There were thirteen children in our family, ten boys and three girls. Five of these children did not survive infancy. The eldest child was born when my father was twenty-nine. My parents were always very worried about whether they would be able to raise their thirteen children to adulthood. In summer they only had the milk of two cows to feed their children, but not enough extra to make cheese. In winter they never had enough meat to eat. Because they were unable to obtain sufficient clothes, during the summer the children usually went about naked. In winter, on average there was one gown and one pair of boots for each two or three children. The others draped their parents' old gowns or sheepskins over their backs while they sat around the fire. In order to feed so many children, they looked after the livestock of one of the temples at our local monastery which was situated on the Nükht river. They would herd two or three hundred sheep from the livestock reserves of one temple. Several cattle might also be taken from that temple to be pastured.

All this would have to be achieved without allowing the animals to fall sick. The animals would be fattened and the wool handed over to the temple stores. In summer the sheep were milked for making cream and various dried cheeses. The cheeses of Dalai Van banner were famous throughout Khalkha and when they were ready they too were handed over to the temple stores. As well as raising cattle, other duties were performed, such as gathering cattle hair and moult, braiding ropes for the temple store, using oxen to transport firewood from the stores in the temple, milking cows and handing over prepared milk foods.

Every year in autumn, the bookkeeper of the temple and the clerks came to us to count the temple livestock, and enumerated the total increase in the number of new-born animals. If the animals were fat and growing well, the animals would be left with the original household, but if there had been mishaps and losses, the animals would be taken from that household, and transferred to another one. Thus, there was a danger that poor serfs could lose their livelihood.

The advantage of looking after animals in this way was that in summer, once there was enough food to feed the children, any surplus food could be stored away. When migrating, the oxen being herded could also be utilized. If work had been done successfully, two or three bricks of tea could be obtained per year from the stores. If not, then only two sick or starving sheep could be obtained for food. So, having received their "reward," the original animals were tended every day, and every year the new young animals were delivered in spring and fattened through the summer.

The eldest two of the eight children were my brother Damchaabadgar and my sister Baljinnyam, both of whom helped my parents to herd the livestock owned by the monastery.

As the situation of ordinary people worsened during the Manchu dynasty, uprisings against foreign and Manchu oppression occurred and were crushed. Influenced by the revolution in Russia in 1905 and the capitalist revolution of 1911 in China, a national freedom movement developed in Mongolia. The Manchu ambans were removed from both Khovd and Da Khüree and independence was declared. It is correct to regard this period as marking the renaissance of the country. The lord of our banner, Dalai Choinkhor Van Tsedensodnom took part in these activities and advanced to the position of Deputy Foreign Minister of the new Mongolian government. The official obligations of the people of the banner were not reduced in the least. The lives of the ordinary people were as poor as ever, and their ignorance remained unchanged. During this time, my parents continued to live in the old traditional way.

I, Bazar's sixth son, was born in 1912,² the second year of the "Elevated by All" [*olnoo örgögsön* year period].³ As three children had already died in infancy before I was born, my parents felt afraid and panicky. My parents tried to entrust my health to the tsorj lama Dambii of a datsan⁴ of the Nükht Khüree Monastery by giving him my father's most valuable possession, a rifle which could fire a dead straight shot.

When I was eight years old, I began to look after the sheep of this monastery, and in the summer time I went with my mother and sister to look after the lambs and do the household chores. Every summer the household of the nun Tsevegjav camped with us. Her nephew Javzanjav was the same age as me and we played together. We used to play beside an ovoo in the area, running races, wrestling, and playing the "wolf and marmot" game. At that time it was customary for children to play with stones which were made to represent gers, sheep, cattle, and horse herds. This was one example of how children who lived in the country used to try to educate themselves.

We used to have an old dog named Yangir which I would lead along and tease, but one day I became very annoyed at him for biting me.

In autumn, the households of our camp separated and went to their respective winter camps. Having become separated from my companion Javzanjav I was very

² The *Historical Dictionary of Mongolia*, p. 182, has May 14 as Shirendev's birthday. It lists his birthplace as the present-day Shine Ider sum of Khövsgöl aimag, but note on p. 210 below the controversy with Tsendenbal in 1960 over where Shirendev was born.

³ Between 1911, when Northern Mongolia declared its independence from the Manchu empire, and 1924, when it turned itself into the world's first people's republic, the country used the traditional calendrical practice of reckoning years by reign titles. This practice, with some variations, was common throughout East Asia during most of recorded history since late antiquity.

⁴ *dacang* < *rasang* < Tib. *grva-tshang*, refers to any one of nine faculties in a Lamaist monastery.

lonely and often thought about him. One winter, a mendicant monk named Khaatsai frequently visited us and we listened with interest to his reminiscences about his travels around Lake Baikal, in the Gobi, Manchuria, and Hohhot.⁵

As far as the ordinary people and the young were concerned, as there was rarely any other news, they had to take an interest in such matters as religious events, celebrations, meetings, prayers, rumors about the lords and poor people, thieves and swindlers, stories told by parents and other people in the household, guessing games, folk songs and morinkhuur music. Religious matters and magical tricks were not understood at all and they were thought to be caused by secret, magical powers. However, the genuine work of the masses and the things discussed in relation to life were both meaningful and instructive. The old tales, legends, and riddles were an interesting way of passing on information and understanding about ancient history and biography.

My parents did not flatter the rich but they did look with compassion on the poor. They instructed their children to follow the tradition of helping whenever possible, and we have kept pleasant memories of how they themselves lived by these principles. Our parents told us of their admiration for those households and young people who were honest and helpful towards poor people.

It was thought that the making of well thought-out and artistic hand-made multicolored spiral designs, painted playing cards and dice, making planed and engraved dominoes, chess pieces, and objects cast in iron and silver were truly beautiful skills when mastered and could be appreciated by everyone.

When I reflect on the customs of the people and their traditions, I recall many aspects which were good for the education and raising of children. The boys of school-age mostly became novices of the lamas, who taught them religious texts in Tibetan. Without being allowed to understand the meaning of things, they mostly just learned the texts by heart. This was how lamas and monks were schooled in the Buddhist religion which had spread through Mongolia. A learned lama in every temple would take two or three child disciples to teach them the Tibetan alphabet and religious texts in Tibetan. Several verses or sometimes up to half a page would be learned by heart at one time. The majority of those children would have been related to their lama teachers, or else they were the children of the wealthier people of the area.

When staying at the temple, the children followed a set of rules called Jayag. These rules specified that the novices were to memorize the texts taught by their teachers. They were prohibited from loitering, fighting, or causing a disturbance. In addition to learning a few scriptures and attending temple meetings, they also did all the housework for their teachers.

All the lamas in the temple were controlled by the tsogchin or gesgui lamas. Children began to study in the temple from the age of five or seven, and were taught scriptures in autumn, winter, and spring. In summer, when they returned to the countryside to help their parents, as a rule they continued to practice their lessons. Within five or ten years the young monks had memorized the so-called greater and lesser texts. This was equivalent to a modern middle-school education. Beyond this, they were designated lama, gelen or getsel and took part in scripture meetings. Some of those who wished to advance their knowledge further completed three courses at a temple of Buddhist phi-

⁵ Also spelled Kökeqota, Khökh Khot, etc., presently the capital of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.

losophy called a *choir*, which would lead to the religious title Gabj.⁶ Later, passing the agaramba damjaa examination would confer the rank of Scholar of Buddhist Philosophy. The other area of study was conducted by the temple college of Buddhist medicine called mamba where people studied to become lama doctors. The lamas called this profession Sooregva in Tibetan.

Another area was astrology, which provided for the speciality of chronology [the science of calculating the passage of time and the assigning of dates to events]. Some people became proficient in art and made images of buddhas in clay, cast in metal, carved in wood, or painted on silk, cotton cloth, and paper. They studied the technique of drawing and sticking of things on paper called suvaaregva. To master the principles of the above-mentioned specialities, at least ten years of study was needed.

In addition, lamas who were staying in the gers in the countryside used to teach the scriptures to their relatives or the local children. This provided another way for children and young people to master the religious doctrines.

To conduct the official work of the feudal government and administration, literate people were required. Temporary schools were established so that the children of the wealthy and the nobility could study the Mongolian script. These schools were located in Niislel Khüree (now Ulaanbaatar), Khovd, Uliastai, Vangiin Khüree (now Bulgan), Zayayn Khüree (now Tsetserleg) and at the banner seal (official administration) offices.

Before the revolution, there was such a school with forty-seven children in Ulaanbaatar. There were about twenty banner seal offices and evidence for the existence of over 200 pupils [in total]. As official business carried out in Mongolia between the aimag, banner, and government administration had to be completed in Mongolian script, students from the above schools would be employed by the government to work as clerks or assistant clerks. Due to the importance of that work, the most qualified young people were sent back to their native districts to undertake those clerical duties.

Since Manchu and Mongolian were adequate for communications between the Mongolian Foreign Ministry and other official places and the office of the Manchu Amban in Niisel Khüree, and for official communications from the Jurgaan which administered Mongolian affairs in Beijing, some talented and able children and young people were made to specialize in writing official documents in Manchu, Chinese, and Tibetan. Among them were the famous pre-revolutionary Mongolian intellectuals B. Tserendorj, A. Amar [1886-1939], and L. Dendev. B. Tserendorj knew Mongolian, Manchu and Chinese, L. Dendev knew Mongolian and Manchu, and A. Amar knew Mongolian, Manchu and Tibetan. I note in passing that although it was called Manchu, the script was Mongolian.

Included among the many literate people in the aimags and banners were the famous scribes Shinen, his son Badrakh, Ganjuur and his son Gar'd, the officer Danzan and his son Davaajav, A. Damdinkhüü, M. Badrakh and his son M. Lkhachinjav, Orgikhnorov and his son Baljirdagva, M. Gürragchaa, G. Bazar, B. Damchaabadgar, E. Batkhüü, and others of the Ikh district (now Shine-Ider sum of Khövsgöl aimag) of Dalai Choinkhor Van Banner of Sain Noën Khan aimag.

While they were being taught Mongolian and Manchu for conducting govern-

⁶ *gabcu* < Tib. *Dkah bcu* < Skt. *krecchra*, *daca* "he who has mastered [the ten difficult things], i.e. who is able to interpret a term in ten different ways.

ment matters, the young people were also taught Tibetan for religious purposes. However, the ordinary people had a great desire to learn their native language. It was the custom among ordinary people that if anyone owned a book, they would use it to teach their own children or the children of the neighborhood while doing their house work.

Looking back on it now, as there were few livestock to tend but many family members and children in the household, there was plenty of opportunity to teach writing. [However], depending on the situation at the time, domestic and herding work was a priority, and writing was taught only during free time. The highest priority was to give children an education in labor, though it was also desirable to teach them writing. It was the custom that young people be taught about housework and livestock herding from an early age.

For example, children were trained to sleep and rise at specified times. From dawn to sunset the time could be estimated by observing the height and rotation of the sun's rays reflected within the ger. The children started to help by bringing firewood into the ger and fetched drinking water or snow and ice. They learned to look after the lambs and calves and to herd cattle and horses. The boys learned to cut firewood, to clean livestock pens, to saddle and bridle horses, riding techniques, moving and setting up camp, dismantling and erecting gers, gathering animal hair and wool, tanning sheepskin and leather, making felt, livestock corrals, shelters, and clay storage jars for milk foods.

Some of the children of the people who did blacksmith work and carpentry followed their fathers' professions and learned to make iron strikers and knives, and artistically decorated objects made of copper, brass, silver and gold, or wooden objects such as buckets, containers, saddles, chests, ger frames, and so forth. The children learned to use the tools of carpenters, such as axes, saws, adzes, planes, and files which were needed to make such objects. The boys from hunting households mastered all kinds of hunting methods using guns and traps. The children of farming families studied plowing, planting, the watering of fields, and raising and harvesting the growing crops.

The girls learned how to cover and un-cover the smoke-hole of the ger, light fires, prepare tea and meals, milk cows and other animals, boil milk and skim the cream, make cheese, store clothing, begin cleaning the ger, cut material for boots, gowns, hats, jackets and shirts, sewing and decorating felt and leather, quilting and adorning things with spun thread, and cutting out and hemming clothing and embroidering beautiful things.

In addition to this education in everyday work, the children and young people learned about morals and ethics. They were taught how to respectfully invite grandparents, parents and their seniors into the ger to be seated on properly arranged carpets and offered food and drink. When older people gave the children presents, these children would accept them with respect, taking the presents with both hands. On the other hand when children were giving presents to their elders, the senior person would bless the child by raising his arms and wishing that the child would grow up to be tall and strong.

At Lunar New Year, the children and young people would greet their grandparents, parents, and elders with outstretched arms. In former times, during every celebration, the children and young people would sit quietly and listen attentively to all the ceremonial teachings and discussions of the elders without causing any disruption. It was also the custom that children would assist the old people in the neighborhood as much as possible.

While milking the animals and doing herding work, the children and young

people would learn to sing long songs and short songs and learn to play music on the morinkhuur and flute. During their free time between doing the housework and looking after the animals, they had running races, wrestling competitions, and at dusk they played a game involving throwing and finding a white stick. Besides traditional games like Mongolian draughts, dominoes, card games, and shagai, they played with stones which represented gers and livestock. Education was principally based on the Mongolian saying "To become a person you start by being small, to become a mount you start by being a foal."

From early times, it was customary for the Mongols to want to teach their children to read and write. In the publishing industry this was called "the science of educating the people." In the 1960's a doctorate dissertation on this subject was published by the scholar Volkov of the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

The herdsman G. Bazar of the above-mentioned Ikh district used to teach the Mongolian script to his own sons and other boys who wished to become lamas. At that time, writing paper, books, pens, and pencils were scarce. Well-read people used to write with ink pens on soft, thin Chinese paper called *muutuu*.⁷ However, in rural areas where such paper, pens, and ink were unobtainable or, at least, expensive, blackboards were made out of wood and were written on with a sharp-pointed stick coated in ash. To make those blackboards, a log was cut into thin planks which were planed down. Each plank was made about one palm's width in breadth and a hand in length, then coated in grease [lard, tallow] and dried in the sun or in front of a fire. Soot from cooking pots was applied and then it was written on with a stick sharpened like a pencil and then dipped in ash. Four or five pieces of wood could be glued together like a book to form a folding blackboard. After writing in ash on this blackboard, when the lesson was over the ash would be rubbed off and the writing could continue.

In the morning, before the livestock were put out to pasture or early or late in the day when the animals were put in the enclosure, candles or lamps had to be lit to teach the children. My father, Bazar, would, within a few minutes, teach his own children and five or six other children a single word followed by not more than two spelt-out numbers which the children would learn and copy for themselves. He would then show them how to correct their mistakes in the written script. Once the children had been taught all the vowels and several consonants, they were taught how to join letters to form words, and to join words to make sentences. Along with this, children were taught to copy already-copied texts or to copy a few paragraphs from block-printed or hand-copied scriptures which had been translated from Tibetan into Mongolian to be read to the children on long winter nights. Calling to mind a few of those titles, they included "Altan Gerel," "Taravchamba," "Banzragch" and others, and old folk tales such as "The Sea of Stories,"⁸ "Moon Cuckoo," "Magical Corpse," "The Tale of the Thirty-two Wooden Men,"⁹ all of which were interesting to read.

Whether taught to read books or not, all children were told stories by the local story tellers, who during the long winter evenings reminisced about interesting stories in

⁷ From Ch. *maotou* "hairy head."

⁸ See *The Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* = *mdo bdzans blun*, or, *The Ocean of Narratives* = *Üliger-ün dalai*, translated from the Mongolian by Stanley Frye (Dharamsala : Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1981).

⁹ For one version of this folktale and an English translation, see *The Mongol Tales of the 32 Wooden Men*, translated and annotated by Sushama Lohia (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1968).

verse such as "The Manly Heroic Hunter Rinchen" and "The History of Khan Kharankhui." Also, the rural people thought it was extremely useful to develop the minds of their children by getting them to work out clever puzzles. It was the custom for the rural people to explain intellectual things to their children as well as they were able to.

For the subject of arithmetic, the parents taught their children to count from one to ten, then in tens up to 100, one thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, a million, ten million, and up to a hundred million. In addition, there were numbers for a billion, a hundred billion, and so forth which were certainly not taught in our area. There was a custom that parents use concrete examples to teach the four areas of arithmetic, rather than endlessly counting numbers. Ankle bones, stones, and livestock were used to represent units from ten up to one hundred to explain the four areas of arithmetic.

For example, they would ask if you add two ankle bones to ten ankle bones or sheep, how many would there be? Or if three are given away from the ten ankle bones or sheep, how many are left? If ten ankle bones or sheep are divided equally between two people, how many will each person have? If ten ankle bones are multiplied by two, how many will there be? When teaching the four areas of arithmetic, some families included figures of hundreds and thousands to be worked out by the children. Abacus techniques were also taught.

Rural households supplied the children with information on weights and measures. These included *fun*, *tsen*, *lan*, *van*, *zhin*, *sööm*, *töö*, *tokhoi*, *delem*, *ald*, *alkham gazar* (Chinese mile), *modny gazar*, *örtöö gazar*, and so forth.¹⁰ Children were also taught about measuring lengths and calculating areas and a basic knowledge of geometrical methods concerned with the shape of things from a practical point of view, triangles, rectangles, ovals, circles, round shapes, kidney shapes, and so forth. Every-day examples were used when children were taught about the orientation of the stars and planets, the cycle of twelve years and their respective names, the sixty-year cycle, the months of the year, weeks in a month, days of the week, and the hours of the day. In the same way, eclipses of the moon and sun, the Milky Way, Orion, Pleiades, the Morning Star, and the Polar Star were taught to children. This was important when estimating the time during the night and finding correct [compass] bearings.

Rural households taught their children the names of the different colors, the five basic colors and their shades—white and whitish, red and reddish, green and greenish, blue and bluish, yellow and yellowish, and other refined tints. The colors of animals could be carefully distinguished using this knowledge.

When children were taught descriptions of anatomy for the first time, they were familiarized with the names of the joints, limbs, and many of the bones of animals.

Children were also given an understanding of geography from an early age. Ex-

¹⁰ Some of these traditional terms are still being used privately, but the metric system is the sole official standard. Aside from being inherently unstandardizable, most traditional terms have had shifting values over time and space. Hence the following remarks should be considered only approximations. The first five are derived from Chinese, and their current values in China are as follows: *fun* < Ch. *jin* = .5 kg. The only meaning of *van* that I know of is derived from Ch. *wang*, "prince". The remaining terms are linear measures: 1 *ald* consists of 5 *tokhoi*, originally the distance between the middle fingers of a man's outstretched arms, ca. 1.6 meters; *tokhoi* is the same as a Chinese *chi*, or foot; a *töö* is the distance between the tip of the thumb to the tip of the index or middle finger when extended; *sööm* is about the same as *töö*; *delem* equals half an *ald* and is the distance from the tips of the fingers of an outstretched arm to the shoulder of the other arm; *alkham gazar* is a step or pace; *modny gazar* perhaps is similar to *tokhoi*; *örtöö gazar* is the distance between stages on the old relay system, about 30 km or 20 miles.

amples of mountain dales, plateaus, ridges and mountain ranges, woods, hills, slopes, plains, valleys, steppes, terraces, meadows, north and south facing mountain slopes, gorges, rocks, precipices, ditches, ponds, salt marshes, lakes, seas, rivers, streams, springs, and oases, were given to further increase their understanding.

As far as vegetation was concerned, all kinds of trees and bushes, grasses, flowers, leaves, fruits, mekheer, gichgene, yamaakhai, onions and wild onions grew in our area about which information was available.

Regarding animals, children were given an understanding of the name, age and sex of each of the five main livestock animals and the names and appearance of the fauna of the area. Children gained knowledge about the useful minerals and raw materials starting with rain stones, spar, talc, all kinds of flint, whetstones, copper, ochre, lime, sand, clay, gravel, turquoise, silver, gold, and so forth. These examples should be taken into consideration for the teaching of Mongolian and the revival of an education in native terms.

The children and young people respected their teachers very much and it was the custom for children to look after their books carefully. Some households and districts had a small number of books. This would nowadays be regarded as the household library. One example of how the Mongols respected books and their teachers is seen in the saying "learning is a noble wealth" which existed from ancient times. The common policy was to educate children in everyday work and morals and to provide practical information about nature and the world. However, some khoshuu and sum were only concerned with teaching the traditional script to a small number of children.

We had a folk tale concerning a bird called the Khan Garuda which was a very able and powerful creature. It used to be said that in the end it sprouted wings like a bird and became immensely powerful. Not long afterwards, a man from our district called Gelenkhüü, who was a talented artist, made some wings out of goatskin sacks which he held under his arms while he jumped from a high cliff on the north bank of the Ider river. Intending to land on some soft sand he descended into a herd of sheep causing a great commotion. Some time later I made a careful study of the biography of that same Gelenkhüü and in fact one of his dance compositions, called "Artistic Jade," was performed on the stage of the National Opera and Dance Theater.

The fine arts of the ancient peoples were frequently encountered on the rocks and cliffs of our area. These included monuments, stones, and high or low circular or square burial mounds with stone monuments surrounding them or radiating outwards from them. Occasionally, when traveling across the steppe one comes across arrow heads, bronze and copper knives, and still-growing trees torn apart by lightning, all of which are evocative, giving birth to ideas which try to explain them. When our father used to talk about these burial mounds he explained that they were the burial places of many people who died in a great battle and the stone monuments were memorials to the heroic warriors.

People were fascinated by some old script at the end of a ravine called Khuyagt. It was said that this writing dated from a very ancient time and there was only one person in our area who could read it. He was a nobleman called Sürenjav who lived at the beginning of this century. He knew ancient scripts and was proficient in both Manchu and Mongolian. My elder brother Damchaabadgar used to say that astride his horse, he would point with his whip at the script and read it aloud word by word.

In winter, my father would find time to read us stories from old books and biog-

raphies which he then discussed with us. He would also get us to guess riddles. One autumn we moved eastwards away from the lake and while we were staying at our autumn camp, a man turned up on a horse with his wrists bound and a large square block of wood around his neck. Another mounted man who was with him made him wander around the households of the encampment. Sometimes he was given some tea, and sometimes not. Having been found guilty of theft, he was being sent along the horse-relay route. This explained why he had the heavy wooden cangue around his neck. I observed the demeanor of this man and the situation he was in. He was making loud sobbing noises, obviously feeling ashamed of what he had done.

Early in the spring when the other households neighboring our winter camp moved away, we were the only household left in the entire camp as we had no transport. My father would go long distances to beg other households for transport and used to return home late at night.

Every night dogs barked and owls hooted incessantly on an uneven rock to the north of the winter camp. Because of this my mother felt uneasy. For a long time it was said to be a place where there were vampires, and this recent incessant noise from the owls was a bad omen. The noise from these birds frightened us and gave us nightmares. We younger children continually had nightmares because my father, mother, and my older brothers and sisters were constantly talking about campsite vampires, black demons, graveyard corpses, and almas [abominable snowmen] from the wilderness. All of this made us afraid to go out of the ger in the darkness of night.

Soon afterwards, my father did some herding work for a family and found some transport. We somehow managed to move from our winter camp, and traveled a distance of almost one örtöö. While we were spending the summer at Nükht Khüree news spread about a fortuitous event which was taking place. This was the imminent arrival of the banner lord's lama teachers who were proceeding towards our Nükht monastery. There were some special banners in Khalkha where Tibetan lamas used to come to live near the lords in order to give them teaching. These lamas, who had been invited from Tibet and assigned to the banners, were called gachin teachers.

As Dalai Van, the lord of our banner was a man of high standing, from early on he used to invite gachin lamas from Tibet to stay at the monastery in the banner. The last of these lamas whom he invited was a man named Regdelbürelgüü who lived alongside our lord Tsedensodnom. This gegeen was a novice, a thin Tibetan teenager with a swarthy appearance who was accompanied by twenty or thirty Tibetans who had also come to stay in the banner. The gegeen even had his own livestock corral and treasury. As all the contributions from the banner people went into this treasury, he became very rich. As he was with officials named after special clans, he too was given the clan name of Lamkhai. During the first period of the people's government, he had a square, two-story building constructed called a semchin.

In order to invite the Vanchin Bogd [Panchen Lama] who was living in northern China, great preparations were made and livestock and silver were appropriated from the people. During the spring before the arrival of these lamas, there was a great flurry of activity and offerings had to be arranged for this propitious event which resulted in some people becoming impoverished.

Before the Bogd's arrival, a reception area was prepared on the west-facing slope of Nükht Khüree. This required the cutting of a large number of tall, beautiful green trees from the mountain which were transported by ox-cart to be planted in several

rows lining his route. A garden was laid out in a few days. The yellow and blue-striped gers, a large plain red-striped ger and many other tents were erected. Mares were caught and milked, and cheeses were prepared along with gifts of flour, tea, cotton cloth, silk, and other goods. The lama arrived together with his large retinue and they filed majestically on horseback towards Nükht Khüree. On each of the five days that the gachin lama was at the temple, he would come to the door of the tsogchin temple. Seated on a high cushion with supports, he would give a lecture by reading scriptures and turned many worshippers into disciples.

While the lama was reading the scriptures, all those who wished to become his disciples were prostrating themselves before him, praying and making offerings. However, it was not that easy to become a disciple merely by kow-towing. First of all, the wealthy and affluent and other colorful and respected personages would go on the first day to occupy the front or best seats while the poorest people would go on the last day and would have to sit far away in the distance. (Despite this they still considered themselves very fortunate). My parents took turns with the neighboring households to go there and kowtow to the lama.

My parents led the older children, who were on foot. The little ones were carried in a basket on the back of an ox. In this manner they traveled a distance of half an örtöö. They struggled through the dust scattered by all the mounted people in the heat of summer and continued along, tired, weary and thirsty through lack of water. They finally sat down a considerable distance from where the lama was giving the lecture. The gachin lama sat on a tall cushion in the main doorway of the tsogchin temple, and while holding a tiny hand drum, read the scriptures in Tibetan. Beside him were two Tibetan lamas who occasionally said something. His interpreter was a Tibetan lama who spoke Mongolian badly and although it was almost impossible to hear him with the commotion going on, now and then we heard someone telling us we should kow-tow and pray hard. After we had returned home, the lamas headed back to the banner center.

The next spring we all moved and spent the summer near the lake. As autumn approached we made camp, herding some sheep at a wooded cliff called Tüleen Davaa. Since there was plenty of mekheer growing in that forest, the mice had stored a load of mekheer which we all helped to collect in several sacks to be dried later.

One year, towards the end of summer, a group of Russians came and spent several nights at our camp while they were buying up livestock. The local people purchased cigarettes, tobacco, white khadag,¹¹ sugar, and felt hats from them. One day, my friend Javzanjav and I were leading some sheep along the far end of the Shar valley when we caught sight of one of the Russians from afar. We were afraid and ran away. We watched him walking towards the lake and suddenly he lay down. Then, there was gunfire. We were terrified and tried to flee with our sheep in the direction of our gers. The Russian then stood up, picked something up and fired into the air. There was a lot of smoke and a small bird which was flying fell to the ground. I now understood what was happening and waited to look at the bird which had been shot. Gradually, I approached nearer and nearer but could not go right up to it. However, when I had got quite a bit closer I looked back and saw the man apparently breaking and folding his gun. Since we had never seen a shotgun before, we assumed that he had dismantled and left his gun

¹¹ An elongated piece of cloth, often made of blue silk, that is presented on ceremonial occasions draped over both outstretched arms. It is given either by itself or in conjunction with another, more valuable gift.

after finishing his shooting and we went back home. Later on, the people in our area became acquainted with that man and they used to say he was a pleasant character and used to give the children sweets and toys.

We decided to make our autumn camp near the edge of the forest at Tüleen Davaa. Russians often used to drive cattle through there. We watched them as they went by and wanted to meet them, but did not have the courage to do so. Then one day, when my father had gone out to the sheep and we were left at home with my mother, a Russian came along thrashing his whip and rounding up some cattle which were grazing beside our ger. We noticed him, and while we peered at him through the door of our ger, my younger brother Namjil confidently went out and approached the Russian, who asked in broken Mongolian, "How are you?" He called to my brother, "Come here, come here, come here," and he gave him ten möngö,¹² a beautiful tobacco box, and several sweets wrapped in paper. On seeing that, we all filed out and raced up to that Russian. He searched about himself and also gave us some ten möngö pieces and some sweets. However, no one except my younger brother got one of those interesting and beautiful tobacco boxes. That was how we first saw a Russian.

In later years, when the Russians used to come through our area on their way to the Soviet trading organization Tsent Soyuz, we got to know them very well and went to their gers and tents to help them carry water and saw firewood. In return they gave us some cakes. I learned the two words "Zdravstvui, tovarishch." It is now amusing to think how awkwardly I spoke my first words of Russian and how equally uncomfortably that Russian said "How are you?" in Mongolian.

We spent the spring in a ravine in the first mountain pass west of the well. At that time I had a great desire to go to Bogd Khüree to see what was going on there.

Occasionally there were camel caravans which stretched into the distance passing along the road in front of our ger. These were continually traveling between Khüree and Uliastai. Once I managed to follow a caravan a considerable distance along the road to Khüree but my older brother Damchaabadgar came and forced me to return home. That evening I was scolded by my brothers, sisters, and parents.

My parents prepared the food for a household, churned butter, helped with the making of felt, and received a little payment which they used to make a living. They raised a small number of sheep until they had between thirty and forty in addition to three or four head of cattle.

Following the rise of the people's government, some local people, in particular the rich people, were stuck in their winter camps and decided to sue their lord for the right to camp in winter in two wide valleys called Toson and Khongor, where it was the custom to pasture the lord's horses. Subsequently, some poor and middle-ranking herding families who had lost their winter camp pastures were expelled from their old land and decided to look for new places to spend the winter.

So, one autumn, my family left our district and moved a distance of three or four örtöö over several days to camp at a place called Khongoryn Punzet. Having arrived there, we all missed our home district, including our friends who were the same age as us. We spent the winter with the Luvsantseren and Manuustai households in one of the ravines at Punzet. Both of them had several children. As they too had recently arrived in

¹² Until the outbreak of massive inflation in the early 1990s, the national currency, the tugrig, consisted of 100 möngö.

the area, we all got on well, spending the winter in this strange place.

After the three families had put away their livestock, eaten their evening meal and covered and warmed their gers, they lit their oil lamps and listened to the many stories told by the old man Manuustai. These included stories of a black monster with ninety-five bald heads, a short black fifteen-headed monster, and the glorious heroic hunter Rinchen who spoke out for the people. It took him three nights to tell, entirely in verse, the story of that poor-man's hero. He also talked about the Lunar New Year. These stories were told by ordinary people, with little variation across the country, and they have now been published.

The poor people in our area used to have a saying "Once in a while one gets enough to eat but at New Year there is always enough to eat". According to old customs, although the ceremony of seeing in the New Year was thought to be a little more special in one's local area, in fact it was generally the same everywhere. In old Mongolia it was the largest and best celebration held by the people. New Year was regarded as a time when the progressive year-round suffering was relieved. This celebration was planned and prepared well in advance.

In autumn, delicious milk foods were prepared and stored for New Year. Around October, tasty butter was churned and in November food to be offered at New Year was prepared, including mutton, and in settlements pastries were made, including a pastry shaped into five branches, and one shaped like a gabj wheel. The rural people also made pastries, boortsog, and meat dumplings. Jujubes, sugar and some gift items were purchased from Chinese shops, as were bolts of cotton and silk cloth and all kinds of khadag, silk and cotton thread.

The extent of these preparations depended on the wealth of each household. The people near us completed these preparations a few days in advance. On the eve of the New Year, portraits of Buddhas were put on display and in front of these, fresh offerings were placed in small cups. In front of the Buddha's altar there was a large plate on which were arranged pieces of a sheep—the head, the back of a thigh, a shin bone, a shoulder blade, four long ribs, the stomach, and a tail. Pastries and sweets were placed on another plate. Candles and incense were lit that evening and the children and young people would eat their fill.

All the households would visit each other carrying plates of food and pots of tea. After reminiscing about things together they would leave three pieces of ice on the lintel of the ger as they left. This was done so that when the Lkham Buddha proceeded around the gers that evening to see off the present year and see in the New Year he could have a taste of those pieces of ice.

People would rise early the next morning and offer candles and incense to the buddha. The fathers and their sons would take some incense and an old length of khadag which would be treated respectfully by taking it up a tall hill or rock [*sic*, probably ovoo -tr.] facing the sunrise. Then the khadag would be presented to the rock [ovoo] and the incense and juniper were lit to produce smoke and several prostrations would be made to the local deities.

From early times, there was a tradition among the Mongols connected with the noble relics of Chinggis Khan which were found in the area of the Örgön [Ergüne] river near the Amur river. The tradition stated that these relics included what was unquestionably the banner of his imperial majesty, Chinggis Khan. Later on, Manchu officials claimed it was the banner of a Manchu emperor, and after the establishment of the Bogd

Khan nation, it was assumed by high-ranking politicians to be the banner of the Bogd Khan.

Male children who had come of age wore steel strikers and knives on their gowns, which were adorned with cuffs. The girls wore rings and earrings. Everyone, both rich and poor, wore their best clothes on that day. Women from wealthy households wore silver head-dresses studded with coral, pearls, turquoise, and azure stone in addition to earrings and rings. A wife would wear a deel adorned with trimmings of brocade and ribbons over which a rippling formal gown would be worn. It all appeared curiously beautiful.

The ceremony on New Year's Day began with a greeting for the most senior person in the ger followed by one for the parents. Having heard their loving felicitations, the celebratory milk foods would be eaten with other food and drink. The most senior person from nearby or neighboring households, or from among close relatives would be greeted. In one of these greetings, the younger person would ask "Are you well? How is your health? Are your livestock healthy?" A silk khadag would be placed over his hands, palms facing upwards. The open end of the folded khadag would be facing the senior person during the greeting, and the older person would accept the khadag and express his good wishes. He would say "A colt has shoulders, a calf has muscles, have you entered the New Year well?" Then they would feast and eat meat and fat. Bانش (boiled meat dumplings) and buuz (steamed meat dumplings) would be made for the most honored guest.

When visiting other households, the adults would give presents and, in return, would receive presents when leaving. The children were also given gifts of food. This continued for several days or throughout the month, with people visiting one another, playing dominoes, dice games, shagai, cards, and other games. The meat and food which was placed in front of the Buddha at New Year was removed after three days and distributed among neighboring households and relatives. Everyone followed this popular custom, but occasionally someone was greedy or crooked, and this character would be accused and scolded by many people.

One New Year, a badarchin (mendicant monk)¹³ arrived in our area and wandered around the households begging for alms. He had finished his training at the dom (nowadays a graduate school) and while trying to pass the required examinations in religious debate, was trying to collect his expenses from the many worshippers. In accordance with his wishes, khadag, cotton scarves, squares of silk, halves of brick tea, sheep, and occasionally a few grams of silver were gathered in considerable quantities.

Once, when he had arranged to spend a night with one of the wealthy people of our area, he hoped to receive a pile of gifts. As night approached in that household, the food placed in front of the Buddha had not been put away. When the pilgrim entered, the owner of the ger and his wife stopped talking. Since they wanted to send the newly-arrived lodger on his way they gave him a cup of old, stewed tea and some dried fat. The resourceful pilgrim ate his fill of the family's milk food, and as was his prerogative, decided to accept some further offerings. The lama then knelt in front of the Buddha and after mumbling some scriptures said in a loud voice several times "Well, let's do it properly," to the ger owner's great astonishment. Noting his surprise, the lama replied, "This

¹³ Badar is a begging bowl.

year at New Year the Buddha will proceed through some lucky households, and he may even come to yours in the form of a portrait of the Buddha. Before I proceed onwards, if you gather the food and divide it among many people, luck will favor you."

The owners of the ger believed what the lama had said. Taking the meat from in front of the Buddha, they heated it up and ate their fill together with the lama that evening and the next morning. Again thinking that the Buddha would bestow good fortune, the ger owner gave the lodger pilgrim two pieces of silver.

At the end of winter and spring, very heavy snow fell in our area. The snow became so packed down that the livestock could not graze. Snowstorms followed one after another over several months, and for several nights snow continued to fall, which resulted in a dangerous frost. This was known as the "Iron Frost Year." Some of the very able households drove their livestock away to far-off pastures, saving half their animals and letting half die. Some resourceful households cleared snow and looked after their livestock, a few of which survived. That year all the households, both rich and poor, lost huge numbers of livestock in the freeze and all of them became impoverished. We nearly lost every one of our small number of livestock and were left with one cow, one mare and five sheep.

At that time, the poor people said that if you encounter good fortune, when you come across a *jasaa*, you will have enough to eat. If possible, every household maintained the custom of reading the *jasaa* every year. The oldtimers used to say that in Tibetan *jasaa* meant "everyone eats together." The reading of *jasaa* was intended for the good fortune of the master of the ger and for the asking of his own blessing from Heaven.

There used to be a custom in our area involving the reading of a certain Buddhist *jasaa* called *Gobi Lkhaa* or *Dalkh*. The *jasaa* would be read once a year on the day appointed by the lamas. Between one and three lamas were invited to read it. The most senior lama sat at the front with a bell and a hand drum. The lama following him clashed a pair of cymbals. Behind him there was a young lama beating a drum. Special readings were devoted to this *jasaa* and suitable offerings were made to it.

During the reading of the *jasaa*, offerings were made according to the number of spirits present. In one part of the offering, starting from the right hand side, two cups of water, one cup of barley studded with incense, a candle in a cup and one cup of flour were placed in that order. In addition, in front of the offering to the spirits, and in front of the lama reading the scriptures, there was a cup of alcohol called "sacrificial liquor." A summons was made for good fortune, and to give the appearance of a blessing being received, the hands were held open. The "summoning vessel" contained "nine treasures," milk foods, barley, and all sorts of other items. This vessel would always be preserved by the household. After three days, when the "summoning of prosperity" was over, the meat in the platter was taken out and a special portion was given to the children and young people. This was specially divided among the brothers and sisters as a share of the "summoning."

Around the beginning of the revolutionary period, all kinds of news about the Baron and Chinese forces spread among the local people of our area. We heard that of the Chinese who were panicking and fleeing, only one had come through our area but he had been killed. There was talk of perhaps a few dozen of the Baron's "White" troops, who arrived at the local households and plundered saddled horses and clothing, cattle, and sheep. A group of people in our banner under Radnaa had put up some opposition,

refused to hand over their goods and were seized, beaten, and interrogated. They said Radnaa had fled and was returning. From time to time we heard that the Chinese and the Baron had been crushed and a people's government had been established, but as we were young we did not understand much about it.

At the beginning of 1923, the first Party cell was established in our area. Its first members were Choisdoo and Baljirjav. At that time, the old administrative head of our district was changed and a member of the people's government became its leader. It was said that official work had been reformed. Choisdoo, and other ordinary herdsmen, actively took part in the Party and administrative work in our area, and for this they were subjected to a considerable amount of insult and mockery. When thinking about it later, I saw that this was all the work of rich people and lamas. At the same time, Choisdoo worked on everyone's behalf in the sum cooperative and as leader of the Party cell.

In 1928 I myself became one of Choisdoo's students and learned Mongolian writing from him. I lived next door to him in the center of the sum. The ordinary people, the so-called members of the People's party wearing their Khalimag hairstyles and tsan hats and most of the young children, understood little about what was being said about the victory of the People's Revolution. It was sometimes heard that certain officious people had put themselves forward to lead the Mongolian nation, but children did not often understand what this meant.

Sometimes it was said that because the government was bad, and the fate of the masses was wretched, the Bogd had gone blind and his health had worsened. Prayers were read and people prayed to the Buddha. Finally, people realized that these were all rumours spread to counter the revolution and to take in the ordinary masses without them knowing why. However, from 1923 onwards, there began a great and interesting discussion about the People's party and occasionally the ordinary people talked about Sükhbaatar and the revolutionaries. Later on the singing of a new song called "Shivee Khiagt" became popular among young people.

We went down to the end of the large ravine called Khongor which was used during the migrations of the wealthy family Davaajav mentioned earlier. After reaching the north bank of the Ider river, we went upstream to the mouth of a ravine called Khujirt which pointed north. We decided to move camp to a hilly place with hollows on the north bank of the Ider, where many khargana and sage brush plants grew. I used to go there to work for this Davaajav household. The river Ider was both long and fast, with clear water which in summer was always full of birds and fish. The great valleys and mountains on the south side of the river had forests, with high and low peaks, tiny ravines, rivers and streams, and many beautiful rocks.

In summer, many households made camp in the valleys to the north and south of the river, and I have pleasant memories of the people coming and going. One spring, while I was watching over some 200 lambs which belonged to this man Davaajav, I saw several lambs running away from the edge of the herd. I caught sight of several yellowish dogs going down towards the lambs. I recognized them as wolves, and I tried to shout but my throat tightened and I could not make a sound. Then, when I tried to run while holding a whip, my legs would not move. During that time these four wolves did not heed me at all. They chased a group of lambs, caught about ten of them and then ran off. So, when it was time to return the lambs to their mothers I drove the survivors back home.

When I told the Davaajav family about what had happened, Davaajav and a horseherder accompanied me to skin the lambs which had been taken by the wolves.

Since the wolves had seized the lambs, thrown most of them over their necks and run off, we returned with only two or three lamb skins. On my return Davaajav's wife Khand did not scold me at all but asked how the strange wolves had appeared and how they had attacked the lambs. Then she tried to comfort me. When Davaajav's elder sister, a nun, brought me into the ger, her companion, an old man called Danzan, was sitting silently reading through old Mongolian sutras. In accordance with an old custom, the nun had me sit down kneeling by the south-west side of the hearth. She put some milk in a bowl which she let me taste and then took an ember from the hearth.

After encircling my body three times carrying the ember, she returned it to the fire. This would drive out any harm and gave hope of preventing another similar loss. Neither the old man nor the woman blamed me for what had happened. After arriving in the new area I decided to befriend and play with Choisüren, the son of Tsogbadrakh, who had a large poor family like ours, and with Tümbii-Oidov, the son of a poor woman, and with my friends Dar'sereeter and Tegsh, who were from middle-ranking households. These two never changed, regardless of the hardship they experienced. They helped me look after the family's livestock.

In winter, it snowed heavily in our area and as it was cold, every household stayed in its winter camp in a ravine. During the few months before the start of spring, all the households became well acquainted with, and wanted to be on good terms with each other. One summer, when we were all living together like this at the top of a wide valley called Khongor, we discussed something interesting which had happened at the previous winter camp.

A marmot had run from beside the family's hearth and crossed the snow to enter a tree stump. The household from which the marmot had appeared had an exorcism performed and offered its only animals to a lama, thereby impoverishing itself. During that spring there was an outbreak of influenza. The subsequent death of a large number of people was blamed on that marmot which had appeared in the ger of that family. Ovoo were built all along the ravine and sacrifices were made. Scriptures were read at Nükht Khüree and in order to save themselves from the danger posed by the bad omen of that marmot, the "pitch fork pressing" was performed. This "pitch fork pressing" could not be done by unqualified lamas. A dough figure called a linga was made which had manacles on its arms and legs. A vampire bat was summoned and appropriated. A hole was dug into which it was placed and it was pressed down with a large stone.

In the autumn of that year, my father took me to Nükht Khüree monastery where I was to be made a lama. I was taken to a relative of my mother, a lama called Badgar. There I took my vows and became a novice lama. When taking my vows I was dressed in a deel with a slanting collar. Having bowed three times to the lama, I received a blessing. While I was holding a silk scarf, after the lama had read something, he blessed me on the head with the scriptures, and gave me a tiny wooden cup to keep inside my deel. A thin red cotton cloak called an orkhimj was wrapped over and around my shoulders, and I was told to be a good lama. My given name was changed and an avowed name was given to me which I have now forgotten.

In the winter my father took me to another lama at Nükht Khüree. Nükht Khüree was on the north bank of a tiny stream called Nükht Gol on the lower slopes of a mountain called Serten. There were about 300 lamas living there in an incredibly disorderly array of narrow dead-end passageways and enclosures. At the time it seemed to be a huge, unending place. This enclosure contained several Tsogchin, Choimprel, and

Khangal-like temples. Their topsy-turvy foundations can be seen to this day in the center of Shine Ider sum of Khövsgöl aimag. The temple was originally built over 150 years previously, out of offerings made by the ordinary people.

The enclosure where our lama teacher lived was at the end of a twisting lane. The large and small gates of the enclosure were painted red. In the northern part of the enclosure there was a summer house with paper windows and a mud roof, one large white ger, and a pile of dried animal dung for fuel.

"Lame" Badgar was a tall, thin gelen lama who liked to do everything in an arrogant manner.

Right in the middle of the enclosure was a Tsogchin temple, the Choimprel temple, and several smaller temples. The Tsogchin temple held services every morning, the Choimprel and Khangal held religious meetings once a year. In winter the temple held ritual exorcisms, and at the end of July the Maidar (Maitreya) ceremony was held. From [lunar] New Year's Eve until the morning of New Year's Day, the lamas read scriptures called "Arvan Khangal." The slow reading of those scriptures accompanied by the sound of bells, hand drums, drums and cymbals, and the daily morning prostrations and greetings during the interval produced a majestic ceremony.

Later on, when I thought about this previously incomprehensible event, I realized that it was actually a ceremonial sacrifice to the Chötgör Lkham. I recall every part of the Arvan Khangal that was read aloud. The best and most exquisite foods and delicacies, which were placed in front of the Buddha, were feasted upon. Having asked for forgiveness and compassion, the pilgrims were seen on their way with polite felicitations.

On ordinary days, services were held in these same temple buildings to save the lives of those who were sick, to cleanse people stricken by suffering and hardship and in order to ensure that the deceased would be delivered into the next life without hindrance. During these services, the relatives of the sick people who had come to give offerings knelt down and prayed for the lives of the sick. This was a sorrowful, pitiful sight.

There was a layman, aged over forty, who was wearing a blue silk deel with brown cuffs. He had long hair, and carried a silver striker and knife. His wife wore a deel made with silk brocade, an over-deel, a glued hairpiece decorated with pearls and turquoise and a silver crown made by one of the blacksmiths of the Dalai Van Khoshuu. It was astonishing to see them stretch themselves out and pray several hundred times over.

The following day I saw a layman in blue cotton clothes and a pigtail along with his wife (a nun) and several children, all of whom were stretched out praying and wailing. During an exorcism, a so-called lüd, which was a tiny dough figure shaped like a human being was taken out and thrown in a direction specified by a lama. That lüd would serve as ransom for the person who had fallen ill. Actually it was this which led to the humorous popular saying "Dough can cheat sinful eyes."

It was said that an exorcism was able to reverse anyone's illness, worries, or any calamity. The lamas said that there were services to prolong life and bring good luck, and long-lasting fortune.

Once, I saw Dambii, the chief lama of the datsan temple, sitting on the front seat of the platform at the Tsogchin temple. He was elderly and wore a black moustache. He was dressed in a yellow silk gown with a "khiag" style black velvet collar with silk brocade.

The main administrator of the monastery was called the tsogchin gesgui. This position in the tsogchin temple was held year after year by a lama from our area called

Sharav. He was a thin man with a black moustache, of average stature and was very intelligent, but had a harsh character. At special meetings he wore a yellow silk gown and a shoovon hat, while during services he wore a hook-shaped hat called a shashir which was curved forwards with an evenly cropped crest, and a cape made of yellow flannel with many ribbons called a janch. In one hand he carried a beree, a large stick adorned with many silk khadag, and in the other hand he held an incense burner on a long rope, filled with smoking juniper. During the meeting he would walk quickly between the benches, or sit in silence. However he also had the right to beat into submission those people who, talking amongst themselves, lacked discipline.

The lovon maaramba and gelen ranks of lamas seemed to be of large build and had ruddy, tanned complexions. Other lamas had prominent ears and long chins, but on the whole they tended to be tall and thin and were dressed in red and yellow silk deel.

Compared with life in the countryside, the rules of the monastery were harsh. Isolated from our parents, from the first day we began to experience the harshness of our lama-teachers. As evening fell, when I went out of the ger to look in the direction of my home, all I could see was the glittering of the stars. No matter how poor we had been, I thought how nice it used to be to sit around the fire with my parents, brother and sisters.

After arriving at the monastery to begin my life with the lamas, my main duties after getting up in the morning were making the fire in the lama's ger, preparing food and drink for the lama-teacher, and gathering refuse from the enclosures and passageways into baskets to be carried away from the temples and disposed of. I also fetched water or, in winter, ice, from the river, cut firewood, and did other jobs.

While doing this tiring work on my own, within a few months I had memorized the Tibetan alphabet and a few short Tibetan books such as the megzem and shirnen beliefs, the praises of the Tsagaan Dar-Ekh, and other minor Tibetan works. In spite of not knowing what they meant, I could recite them without hesitation.

Sometimes I would become tired of working and I would play with novices of my own age. If I had not memorized my books sufficiently well I would be beaten by my teacher. He used a thick book bound with wooden boards to hit me on the head. He would also stab my scalp with a bamboo pen, and would punish me by singeing me with burning incense.

Javzanjav, with whom I had grown up, had long since entered this monastery and had now become quite a well-educated novice. When I went to look for him and found him I was most happy. However, as well as becoming somewhat aloof because he had not seen me for so long, he now considered himself to be an educated lama and no longer thought me important.

One day, when the Choimprel service was in progress, the junior novices such as myself were carrying pots of tea from the kitchen into the temple hall. The pots were too big for us to manage. The temple manager, a gesgui, ordered two of us to help ladle tea for the lamas who were seated throughout the service. There were some ferocious lamas called giig who always carried a stick called a beree to hit people with. I was to start pouring tea from the tea pots into the bowls of the lamas beginning from right in the middle of the row of seats and heading down the row. From the middle upwards, where the more senior lamas were sitting, a different, more experienced person would pour the tea. Once, when I had difficulty lifting a tea pot, after I had served two or three lamas, a lama dropped his bowl of tea, which attracted the attention of all the lamas at the service. As soon as the commotion had begun, one of the two giig, a fat grey-haired lama, came

straight up to me and without stopping to think beat me with his wooden stick and dragged me out of the temple by the ear.

Outside the temple I cried, and thinking about my home, I wandered the streets of the monastery for quite a while. As evening fell, when I went to my teacher's place, he was extremely angry, as no food or tea had been prepared. After hearing about what had happened in the temple hall he scolded me unreasonably. Because I was not allowed to say anything in front of the teacher, I brewed some tea and made the meal in silence. At that point my angry teacher slapped my face and kicked me from behind. After I had given him some food and drink, the lama walked around his ger reading his scriptures, then entered, prostrated himself in front of the buddha and went to sleep.

I lay in bed and reflected on the day's events. Although I was crying quietly, my teacher heard me and scolded me saying "Why do you keep crying, you evil dog?" I fell silent and slept. On rising in the morning, I made his tea for him. When I was examined on my scriptures, since I had not memorized them at all, this teacher was again going to beat me and so I fled westwards from the monastery and decided to walk the two örtöö lengths [60 km.] back to my home.

I continued walking all day and when I had reached the half-way point, I went to spend the night at the ger of the elder brother of that lama-teacher. The family never doubted for a moment that I had escaped, but interestingly, they allowed me to stay for a few days to look after the calves. While doing this, I got to know their children.

Before long, my father learned about my escape and arrived at this household from which he decided to take me back to the monastery. Although I cried and begged him not to send me back to the monastery he would not agree. I returned to the lama-teacher's ger with my father but after a while I fled back again. Word was sent from my lama-teacher to my parents asking for me to be sent back promptly as it was difficult for him with no-one to do the housework and other chores. When I cried and begged not to be sent back to the lama, my mother told me in secret "When you fled and came here, your teacher found it very difficult with no one to do the work. Your teacher will not beat you now."

Thereafter, whenever I was with the lama, very little was said, and generally for that reason, life became easier. When I went to collect water and ice from the river half a kilometer from the monastery, on occasion I was able to meet with the school children from the school building in the newly-built enclosure next to the Chinese shop on the other side of the river.

Every pupil at this school wore an identical blue cotton gown, leather boots, and a rimmed hat. Several of them lived together in a ger with blankets on the beds. They also ate nice meals together. They were taught Mongolian script, and spoke with interest about the People's Party, trade unions, and the Young Pioneer's movement. They paraded and sang songs about the new era, which stirred my feelings and made me want to leave the monastery as soon as possible. I had a growing desire to head towards that school. However, I thought it would be too difficult to achieve this aim.

The monastery ceremonies carried on as before. One winter, I followed the other novices and lamas to observe an exorcism being performed. The sorcery ceremony was held two days before [lunar] New Year on the twenty-ninth day of the last winter month. The exorcisms would be directed towards bad omens as foretold by the throwing of dice. There was another ceremony similar to the sorcery requiring use of a ceremonial object called a dogjir which was made by some households and burned out on the steppe.

The sor was made from a large amount of flour mixed with butter and water and formed into a triangular shape one ald (six feet) or more in height. The free edges were decorated with paper spirals and painted with a continuous design in several colors using oil-based paints. The sor was carried by several people, followed by people carrying cymbals, drums, trumpets, and wood-wind instruments. Then came some lamas reading scriptures, followed by the most senior lamas of the tsorj rank who also took their turn in the exorcism. After the exorcists had done a special dance and made a procession, the sor was thrown onto a triangular pyramid of firewood and ignited with burning oil.

The Maidar (Maitreya) ceremony came around in the summer. When our monastery performed the Maidar, the other monasteries did not perform the tsam. The maidar Buddha was conveyed on a four-wheeled cart in a parade around the monastery, some lamas pulling it from in front and others pushing from behind. There was a legend that a green horse was harnessed in front of the cart conveying the Maidar who would thereby come down from the sky. The Maidar was thought to be the Buddha of prosperous times.

It was said that before the arrival of Buddha there were three gods in our universe, the Buddha becoming the fourth. Following him thereafter came the lovon Badamjunai, Zunkhav, and a thousand other Buddhas, one of whom would be the Mairdar. The lamas said that if the Mairdar was conveyed around a monastery on a cart whose wheels they were turning, his arrival on earth would be accelerated. Following the Mairdar around the monastery was a procession of lamas, including the agaramba, gabj, gevsh, gelen, getsel and those of other ranks. The lamas carried bells, many cymbals, all kinds of drums, conch shells, trumpets, and wind instruments on both sides of the Mairdar. The cart carrying the Mairdar would stop four times, once at each side of the monastery. Scriptures would be read and food and tea called tsav and manz provided for the lamas. Having made a tour of the monastery in this way, the Mairdar was returned to its temple.

The following spring I fled the monastery once and for all and arrived back home. I then met my companions Choisüren and Tümbii-Oidov. After playing on the banks of a beautiful clear river in a ravine where there was much forest and scree, I killed a zuram [gopher] by pouring water into its hole. My lama teacher who had arrived to spend a summer vacation at the ger next door to ours saw me do it and, calling me over, said "Hand over your sash and begging bowl. You have committed a sin by killing that gopher and you have broken your vows. Don't let me see you again near the purity of a temple." I was freed from all my worry and, as fear vanished, my heart gladdened.

When my father found out about what had happened and that I had broken my vows, he scolded me a little and said "You will have to wander about looking after the livestock of the household. Although we thought that having three or four moles on your shoulder meant that a lama's sash was the right thing for you to wear, that is obviously not the case, and it is right that you should carry a gun and become a hunter." Afterwards, I felt relieved when I was completely released from my duty to become a lama at the monastery.

From that time onwards, I spent every day looking after the sheep and cattle of the wealthy man Lkhagvaa and his younger brother Badrakh. After doing so I returned home for a short visit. The family next door to us had built a new ger and I may mention some of the felicitations which my brother Damchaabadgar recited on that occasion.

Established in this humble place
 Is a ger of pure white.
 A pine, finely splintered
 Made like a lotus flower blossoming in eight directions
 Let us anoint these long poles
 Bending the willow tree
 Made of a hundred short ger-pole thongs.
 Made to surround the outside of the fortunate monastery
 Let us anoint the big jade walls.
 Trim the wide boards
 Saw off the tall boards
 Raise the short sticks
 Able to braid ten thousand people together
 Let us anoint the big jade door.

Damchaabadgar could write well and was a good reciter of felicitations and teller of stories. On alternate days I used to either look after the sheep or the cattle of the rich family called Badrakh at the winter camp. Altogether the two households owned around 1600 sheep and 100 head of cattle.

When tending the cattle and sheep, despite having felt socks, Mongol boots, sheepskin deel and warm hats, we still sometimes felt very cold in winter and we had to run about a little in order to get warm. Eventually, the soles of our boots developed holes, and although we spread scraps of leather and felt inside them, the snow still came through the gaps and our feet became cold. We were frozen from looking after the animals and arrived back late. The owners corralled the livestock and gave us hot milky tea to drink. We then chopped firewood and gathered wet cow dung and frozen dung which we piled up to make argal.

After bringing in some snow from alongside the winter camp for drinking water and doing other chores, we ate our evening meal. For our meal we had one sheep's shank, a slice of sheep's tail and a bowl of broth with blood sausage. For breakfast we ate a piece of butter, two tiny pieces of dried cheese, and some curds. We then set off to drive a herd of sheep or cattle out to pasture from the enclosure.

Our payment for a month's work was one young lamb or a brick of tea. At that time, half a sheep would have been a good wage.

While working at Badrakh's we encountered a worrying problem. If any of the sheep or cattle which we were herding strayed even slightly onto a neighboring household's territory, you might be scolded and beaten by the owner of that land. There was a clear boundary between every winter camp in our area. Stones were placed following a line of hills or rocky spurs to delineate the borders of a locality. If any livestock crossed those boundaries, the animals would be captured and confiscated and the person in charge of the animal or its owner would be seized and beaten.

Badrakh carefully continued to pasture his livestock on other people's land. When we returned in the evening after pasturing the cattle, he would come out to meet us and put the cattle quietly onto other people's land to get them to eat plenty of grass. One day, while tending Badrakh's sheep in a beautiful area owned by Namsrai, I was blamed for losing [control of] a hundred sheep which I could not handle.

The winter was barely over when several of us, including my elder brother Damchaabadgar, my sister Baljinnyam, and my friends Choisüren and Tümbii-Oidov

decided to join together the next spring and look after the livestock of the rich man named Davaajav. Afterwards, when I returned home in the autumn, a Chinese man called Khar Maikhant ("Black Tented") who lived in our area had a discussion with my father and agreed to hire me to do some work at his home.

There were two Chinese, Khar Maikhant and Tsagaan, who were idle traders at the Chinese stores at the Tariat and Nükht monasteries. When the households were preparing food [slaughtering livestock] and during the lambing season they bought animal skins and leather. At sheep-shearing time they bought wool. They mowed hay for and obtained furs from the majority of households in our area. Khar Maikhant had built two gers. One contained his possessions. He himself lived in the other one. In the morning at Khar Maikhant's, after I had got up to start the fire, I helped to make tea and a meal, I cleaned the ger, fetched drinking water, did errands, watched over the storage ger at night, and did other jobs for over a year.

Eventually Khan Maikhant decided to keep a ferocious dog. He kept it tied up during the day time and let it loose at night. The reason for this was furtively explained by the local people. This was the one place in the banner where there was a ger full of goods, while the owner stayed in another, different ger. Thieves had therefore tried to rob these goods from the Chinese.

On a snowy night one spring, these thieves quietly approached on yaks, dismounted and took two sacks of flour, several bricks of tea, silk for clothing, cotton cloth, and some pipe tobacco, and went away undetected. The next morning, the Chinese trader went with some local Mongols to follow the tracks in the snow, but could not find them as the thieves had placed Mongol boots over the yaks' hooves. Furthermore, they led the yaks through the snow to a resting place for the livestock, the sun came out and melted the snow, thus destroying the tracks.

Khar Maikhant was particularly afraid of the sound of dogs barking. Sometimes he would stick his rifle through the smoke-hole of the ger and shoot into the air. On occasion, a large number of Chinese would arrive at the household from other places to count the goods and make inventories of the stock. After those Chinese had headed back towards their banners and monasteries, I had nothing to do for a while.

Around that time, a wedding party was being held for the marriage of Lkhasürenjav, the son of a nun and one of the richest people in our area. My father went to sing at this wedding and my brother recited the felicitations. I went along with them to watch the celebration. Lkhasürenjav's ger was brand-new. A khadag and talisman could be seen suspended from the ceiling. There were four or five new chests painted in red with spiral patterns, bookshelves with many compartments at the head and foot of the bed, a container for food and drink called an eregneg, a blue quilted cotton mattress and a wooden bed with a spotted front, all of which made it a very beautiful ger.

When the celebration began, many people from both the groom's and bride's sides gathered together. While the groom was standing with a large number of people from his father's side, the bride arrived with several people on horseback. They tied up her horse and people greeted her. A piece of white felt along which the bride would walk was spread between the tie-post and the ger of the groom's father. A libation of milk was made, the door of the father's ger was opened and she was brought into the ger.

The wedding ceremony began at the encampment's south-western ger, owned by Lkhasürenjav's father. The lamas who were invited sat at the back of the ger on both the west and east sides. The parents of the bride and groom and other people were seated

according to their age and status. The assembled guests feasted on meat, butter, and liquor.

I give below a shortened version of my elder brother Damchaabadgar's felicitation at this wedding.

... Made from a hundred thousand fortunes,
 The Buddhist religion blossoms
 Made from ten thousand good omens
 The laws of nature established
 This universally fine day, it is said
 The khadag of the holy altar of honorable Lkhasürenjav,
 The wine for glamor
 The beautiful bright lamp
 The beautifully-scented lamp
 The snow-white milk
 The lotus as white as a swan
 The fast white horse
 The whole cooked bald white sheep
 The flat white cheeses
 The nine libations are all made of wine
 All have come to overflow
 When returning, be like a spring [of water]!
 When passing through, be like an ocean! . . .

Then, everyone said in unison:

"Let that felicitation last forever!"

When the wedding feast was over, the bride and groom were taken to the new ger built for them on the southeastern side of the encampment. A group of people from both the bride's and groom's sides followed them into the new ger and performed another ceremony. I recall that the ceremony began by lining up some wood chips in the heart of the ger. Butter was poured on them and lit, so starting the celebration. That evening some of the people went home while others stayed until early the next day.

Our household moved to a place called Khongor and after a few days I decided to look after the livestock belonging to Batchuluun, the son of a lama called Mergen. They had a son and a daughter, both of whom were spoilt children. Since their father knew my parents, they treated me quite well.

The lama Mergen, Batchuluun's father, had recently died and his son dried the corpse and interred it in a wooden shrine at the top of a mountain. This structure was known by the local people as the shrine of Lama Mergen. I saw that shrine from a long distance but never went near it. People who had seen it said that it was solidly built from good logs. Inside it there was displayed a portrait of Buddha, along with an arrangement of cups, khadag, tea and silver. The corpse was decorated with silver string, and relatives and disciples went on a specific day every year to offer khadag. Children used to say that on looking through the gaps in the shrine, they saw that the corpse of the lama appeared dried up, just like borts [dried meat]. According to Indian and Tibetan custom, the internal organs would be removed from the corpse of a high-ranking lama. Juniper, wormwood, incense, and other grasses were inserted in their place. The body would be salted

and dried and oil paints applied to its face.

When people were asked what kind of person this lama was, as far as religious status was concerned, he was not particularly special, but he was proficient in magic, and he used his powers of divination and magic on his guests.

Afterwards my family set up camp with a family called Lodon. I tended their sheep and livestock. Lodon lived in his ger with his mother, who was a nun, his wife Dolgor, and their two baby children. They had few livestock but were people of good character. The most complicated work of the ger was done by his mother and his wife. Lodon, the master of the household, read scriptures, burned incense, and used to prostrate himself.

When I was there he found a new skill and became a zodoch. He carried a square tent with the *duvchin* insignia of a learned professional zodoch together with some pots and utensils, and wandered on foot for many days. He cast stones with a leather sling and he would pitch his tent where the stones fell. The doctrine of the zodoch was secret and was not to be discussed with anyone. He would go to the sources of the springs of the dragons, the lone tree, the winter camp with vampires, the encampments and places where the recently deceased were placed, and would read scriptures in the evening twilight and perform rituals without fear. In the process of becoming a zodoch, large hand-drums were used as well as the thigh bone of a woman of at least eighteen years of age which had been stripped of flesh and fashioned into a trumpet called a *gandan*.

Before the reading of his scriptures, a black tassel called a *donroo* was hung over his face. The lama read these scriptures, beating his hand drum, and blowing the *gandan* trumpet. I myself was a witness to this noise and commotion. One evening, when he was alone in his ger, he decided to perform a *lūijin* ceremony. He began by having his mother cover the smoke hole of the ger and shut the door. Then he unwrapped something from a parcel, covered his face with a black tassel and brought out his large hand drum. He extinguished his lamp and sat in silence. Afterwards, he read the scriptures in a loud, melodious voice and blew his trumpet, which made an unpleasant noise. This trumpet, which was made from a human thigh bone, made a terrible noise, one as if made by the dead and which brought about a sickening feeling in those who heard it. Whenever he blew his *gandan* trumpet, dogs began to bark. In the same manner, he pounded his drum hard and shouted and continued his reading. After having performed a little of the *duvchin* ritual in this manner he finished his reading, lit his candle and uncovered the smoke hole of his ger. During the morning after the reading, the lama had a secret discussion with his mother.

"When did the others come?" (she was likely here to be referring to the vampires and demons) his mother was heard to ask. Lodon replied, "After the *gandan* had been sounded." His Mother went on, "When was it released?" Lodon replied, "After a sharp cry it went over a pass at a jutting rock northwest of here."

Some lamas ignored the customs of the people and used all kinds of contrived methods to lead them astray and instill useless things in their minds. There was one reincarnation who was renowned in the district for openly slashing his tongue with a sword and driving a sword right through his chest to emerge from his back. This used to be quite a spectacle.

Once, this particular reincarnation, having assembled a large number of people together in a river valley, came down and pranced about a little. Then, when he began to

bleed through his mouth and nose, some members of the Revolutionary Youth league turned to the assembled gathering of people and said: "Well comrades, watch. We will reveal these swindlers for the cheats that they are." On removing the clothing of the lama he was seen to be wearing a wide, flat, belt-like metal object around his chest suspended from his shoulders. Another metal bar was nailed above that metal sheet, which was covered in silk. When the lama seemed to drive the flexible metal sword towards his heart, it was made to go around his body and appeared to emerge from a hole in his back. Some thin, red vermilion paint was applied to that hole and when the sword went through blood seemed to appear. As the original sword was thin and blunt, the lama could place some vermilion between his teeth and draw the sword gently over his tongue to make it look as if it was bleeding.

Around this time, the lamas and nobility showed a great dislike for the members of the Party and Youth League. Our teacher began to slander Choisdoo (the chairman of the sum cooperative) in all kinds of ways. Apparently, Choisdoo had wanted to put a stop to the Buddhist sacrificial ceremonies, and to arrest and imprison lamas. It was claimed he was untrustworthy and should be eliminated. They spread rumours that he was a troublemaker. After returning from meetings in Ulaanbaatar he also attended regular local Party meetings and carried out propaganda work among the ordinary masses.

He was the sort of person who gained the respect of poor and middle-ranking people with respect. One day, when giving a talk, he spoke of the trickery of the lamas and to mock them he cited an example of this.

The doctrine in the monasteries was aimed at impoverishing ordinary people like us, and all kinds of tricks were used to keep us in ignorance of it. For example, there was a lama who was invited to a household to carry out a religious rite. Having prepared an effigy out of dough he placed a tiny piece of ice where its eyes should have been and placed it near the fire grate. He clanged some cymbals loudly and shouted something. As soon as the ice in the eyes of the dough effigy began to melt, he stopped reading in Tibetan and said in Mongolian 'Eh, you are crying too. Whether you cry or not I will send you off.' Then he beat his drum and clashed his cymbals together loudly."

At this point the people at the meeting roared with laughter. Several lamas who were standing at the back of the meeting quickly ran off. Around that time, a considerable number of poor lamas and novices could be seen abandoning the monastery.

In 1927 my eldest brother Damchaabadgar left us to join the army and we all had more work to do at home. I accompanied a man called Būrgēe to collect firewood from the forest, which I helped to deliver by ox cart to the temples and to the Chinese. That man Būrgēe had ten wooden carts drawn by yak-cow hybrid oxen. I spent nearly two months with him, living in a hut in the forest. My job was to saw the trees he had felled, cut the firewood and look after the oxen. We would spend two days cutting firewood and on the third night we loaded the wood, hitched the carts and journeyed overnight one *örtöö* length in distance to deliver the firewood to the Chinese and lamas. In return for this work I received the meat of one sheep every month and had an opportunity to travel on long journeys for the first time.

There was a wealthy man in our area who, together with a young man called Lkhūndev, used to transport hides and leather to Chinese shops at Mörön monastery using more than twenty camels. On the return journey they brought back flour and grain. I spent over twenty days working with them. Quite warmly turned out in socks, boots and

a sheepskin deel, I led the camel caravan on foot, looked after the camels at the camp, and prior to the departure of the caravan, I made the camels lie down next to the cargo. I also prepared meals and drinks for the two caravan owners and sometimes helped to carry the flour.

I felt very proud to lead a camel caravan for the first time on a journey distant from our area. I never felt the least bit tired and found it all very interesting. We arrived in Mörön, where there was a large monastery on the north bank of the river. Alongside the monastery were Chinese and Russian shops. The gers of the ordinary people surrounded the settlement. In Mörön I was amazed when I saw a moving truck for the first time. The smell of gasoline was apparent from a long way off and it seemed to make a loud, bustling noise. From there we went to Khatgal where it was interesting to see Lake Khövsgöl for the first time with its surface of solid ice over which horse-drawn sledges, carts, and camel caravans could travel carrying Buriats, Russians, Chinese and many other people. At the time, Mörön and Khatgal seemed to me to be unbelievably large towns which almost made my head spin.

When I returned from this journey, I was given the equivalent of two sheep in wages and as I wished to give my parents and my brothers and sisters a gift, I presented them with a brick of tea, three catties of brown flour, and one box of sugar cubes. Late one evening when I returned to our ger, the people in our encampment were greeting Nomkhon and Lkhündev, and everyone was gathered in their ger. They talked about the places they had visited and distributed presents to their relatives. I too was very happy and ran to my ger to hand over the gifts before talking about my journey. I continued for several days telling them about the places I had been to.