

Sacred knowledge of Altai

The Altai Republic or Gorny Altai (Highland Altai), situated in the South of Siberia, occupies a relatively large area running roughly east - west through the region where Russia, Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia meet. The population of the whole Republic is about 200,000 people of different ethnic groups, most of whom are Altaians and Russians. Perhaps due to its remoteness and weak economic development, the Altai Republic has preserved most of its untouched environment, and its historical, ethnic, spiritual and cultural heritage.

Altai is a land of mystery and Beauty. Nikolai Roerich, the great Russian painter, writer and philosopher, said, after visiting Altai in 1926:

“It is strange and mysterious - wherever you go the people would praise Altai. They say that [the] mountains are beautiful here, cedars are mighty, rivers are impetuous and flowers are amazing. Where does this general worshipping of Altai come from?... The Katun river is cordial. The blue mountains are ringing, [and the] sacred mountain Belukha is pure-white”.

It is not only the amazingly beautiful Nature that attracts people from all over the world, but many get a spiritual call to this land of mystery and wonders. Still on many sacred mountains one can see petroglyphs (drawings), many of them made in the time of the stone age. People believe they have spiritual significance. Most of the petroglyphs were preserved here, while being almost completely erased by the church in Europe. One can see ancient kurgans (burial mounds) and vertical stones, which were laid out traditionally over the course of many centuries; the oldest had no drawings, but later on, in the time of bronze age, they had religious drawings such as the world famous "deer stones." In Turkic time, the sculptures ("stone babas"), which depicted warriors, appeared in the wilderness of Altai. According to some knowledgeable people, these standing stones have great spiritual meaning, being oriented to certain constellations and stars. Some believe that those places with standing stones were special places used for performing spiritual ceremonies and rituals in old times.

In Soviet times no religion was supported by the authorities, and religion was even prohibited, although in big cities there were Russian orthodox churches. Christianity had come to Altai mainly with the missionaries in the 19th century. Some native Altai people were baptized to Christianity, but most of the Altai population secretly went on performing spiritual ceremonies, worshipping spirits of the surrounding Nature and spirits of their ancestors, the way it has been done since ancient times.

Altai is one of the most mysterious and unusual regions of the world in its geography, geology, history, spirituality and culture. Many different traditions and cultures seem to have been born here and then they spread all over Asia. Linguists have actually connected the Altaic language to many distant regions, and it belongs to the Turkic language family.

Since the so-called Perestroika in Gorbachyov's time, three religions--Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam--have co-existed here, along with the ancient spiritual belief of the Altai people, which is Shamanism. The religious beliefs of the Altai people have never been free of external influences. Mongolian Buddhism (Lamaism) and Russian Orthodox Christianity were the most powerful external religious factors, especially crucial during the 19th and 20th centuries. The Altai version of Buddhism is called Burhanism (or Ak Jang – White Religion), and it is a mixture of Shamanism, ancient beliefs and knowledge of Nature, with elements of Lamaism and a strong faith for the almighty and benevolent Burhan. Today Shamanism and the ideology of Burhanism are intermixed and obscure. So, a conglomerate of old beliefs, confessions and rituals exist in Altai.

Today Shamanism is being revived in Altai, and along with reviving old unique traditions and spiritual rituals, some have started to misuse old knowledge, making shamanic shows with drums, dancing and strange-looking ceremonies that have nothing to do with genuine ancient knowledge. More and more, the Altai people have begun to be interested in the ancient knowledge, hidden and preserved in legends, epic stories and Bilik (wisdom).

In everyday life, ordinary people come to shamans (in the Altai language – kam) to heal their souls and bodies, or to have success in their endeavors and other cases. The traditional religion of Altai is Shamanism with its characteristic traces of pantheism. According to the Altai belief, all Nature is living and each particle has a soul: mountains, rivers, lakes, springs, and every valley have their own Master-Spirits (eezi). Traditionally most Altai people live in harmony in their families and with their relatives, whom they try to support in any possible way, which is nowadays not typical for humanity, unfortunately. They live in harmony with all the people, the surrounding Nature and the whole world. Misbalance or misbehavior, disrespect, mistakes and deliberately done evil deeds toward surrounding human beings and Nature are a cause of problems, unhappiness, diseases and even death. According to the old wisdom, those who bring evil things and act evilly come under the power of the devil or evil spirits.

Baba Virsa Singh, a great Holy man belonging to the whole world, was confident about the importance of dialogue between scientists and holy people:

“When holy people and scientists come together and start discussion, the scientists will realize that the scientific issues they have been cracking their heads on, have been described in holy scriptures.”

These are the words of Vanga Dimitrova, the world-famous clairvoyant of the 20th century from Bulgaria:

“The time of miracles and wonders will come; science will do great discoveries in domains that are not material. Scientists will discover many facts about the future of our planet and the cosmos. They will find information about it in the holy books. Many enigmas and ancient ways will be revealed...It was predestined...”

It is high time we revive the ancient knowledge/wisdom of the mysterious land Altai, which has been preserved in spite of all historical events.

The crash of the Soviet, collectivist, socialist way of economy brought the crash of materialistic ideology. Wise people of Altai, such as Nikolai Shodoev, believe that the time has come for the third ideology, which he calls Bilikism. It has taken the best trends and knowledge from the previous times, and it will bring people to mutual understanding. It appeared on the basis of ancient knowledge and wisdom of the native people of Kan-Altai. It is a blessing for all of Russia and the whole world as well. The representatives of the local Altai elite realized the importance of being attuned to the new time trends, when people revive their ancient wisdom, so they too try to be closer to their native countrymen and to recollect ‘their roots,’ while only a few decades ago they considered old ways to be primitive. For Altai culture and spirituality, spirits of nature and images of Nature are very important. For the indigenous Altai people, the lifestyle and life-meaning of modern people seem to be strange and senseless.

More and more people realize that it is important to restore ancient knowledge, wisdom and science of Kan-Altai, i.e. Peoples’ Bilik (ancient wisdom).

I love Altai and the Altai people very much, so I have been doing spiritual research on Altai wisdom during my many spiritual expeditions to Altai. A few years ago, I visited the Altai Museum of Ethnography and sacred wisdom in a small village called Mendur Sokkon. The Director of the Museum, Nikolai Shodoev, is really a great zealot, who wrote a few books on Altai Bilik (sacred wisdom) after researching people’s legends as well as epos written by the story-teller Kaichi Kalkin, and gathering information from the books by writer and painter of Altai, Grigoriy Choros Gurkin.

Below I would like to share with you the essence of the knowledge I have taken from Nikolai Shodoev’s books and from my talks with him.

Shodoev says that people are looking for their life’s meaning/significance first of all within themselves, and not in the outer world. They find it in their family soul; they want to continue the life of their clan, to understand: “Who am I, and what is my destination?” It is important to continue the life of the family, clan, people, country to find one’s own place in the people’s

community. In order for one to find one's real place in this time of globalization, one should have a proper philosophy as a basis.

Let's consider some main parts of Altai wisdom (Bilik):

What is the task of Altai philosophy today?

Altai philosophy appeared in public on the all-Russia level only at the beginning of the 21st century. What is the love of God ("Altai-Kudai")? For Western people it can be like this: the love of God is understood as a personal feeling just to Him. Altai people, who were born here and who live here now, see the love of Altai-Kudai holistically: they love the Spirit of Altai-Kudai, all His mountains and peaks, valleys, rivers, plants, woods with animals--with all the Spirits of Altai--they are One, not separate from them. This ancient wisdom makes a man noble, enlightened, inspired; it harmonizes mind, feelings, and consciousness with spirituality.

So, the task of Altai philosophy today is to determine the possibility of directing Altai clans (syoks) towards uniting in variety/diversity.

Possibilities of life meaning determination

Most young people today, unfortunately, do not see the meaning of their own lives. One of the main problems is taking alcohol. How to stop this process of degradation, which was inserted by Erlik, God-spirit of the low world? We see the way out in reviving the heavenly wisdom of uniting the meaning and the role of Altai gods—Altai-Kudai and Uch-Kurbustan—with the world religions of Christ, Buddha, and Allah. To do this we should find the similarities and differences in all these religious trends. We have representatives of all of them in Altai. All these four world religions, along with Altaian pagan faith (White faith) are needed by humanity.

We believe that it is very important to spread the ideas of Bilik among the young people. The love of a future couple already existed long ago, before they were actually born into the physical bodies. They both have one and the same "suus" (spirit, gene) in their future soul when it is still in the sky (Burkan). The possibility to love, and noble, honest behaviour, are determined by the power and energy of the Creator (Ene-Jaan). It develops in the chakras along with the development of the soul and body.

Speaking about spirituality and culture, Danil Mamyev, a man who has devoted his life to the preservation of sacred land, speaks about special energy points on the planet body, and how important it is for every person to understand the significance of the place where he/she lives. He speaks about the importance of preserving and reviving these points on the planet and he does a lot putting it into practice. All land is sacred, and it needs our love and care. In Altai Bilik, much is said on the interaction and influence of the Sun/Moon and the stars on the human being from the first moments of his being (conceiving/birth). The principle of diversity in Oneness can be found in the concept of "positive nationalism," which means to be proud, not of yourself but firstly of the people, the land you belong to. To get this, one should learn more about the traditions and wisdom of his native people, and should study and share the ideas of Bilik with others.

Bilik is very important for the life orientation of the young people. Only those who are able to preserve their national treasure of ancient myths and legends from thousands of years in the past are able to make a difference in the history. Bilik gives knowledge about the tendencies of human and society development as a whole, and of Altaians in particular. According to the Altai Chronology, given in Shodoev's book as an attachment in drawings, there are 6 stages of soul and body development, each one is 12 years. Why is it so? We think today that only the Gods Ulgen and Mangyzyn (a Dragon-the partner of Ulgen) know it, and maybe in the future, people will be wise enough to get an answer. The whole period of human development is 72 years, after this a person possesses enough wisdom to share with the next generations...Bilik considers that a period of 72 years represents one stage of the state and nation development.

What brings success in ideas, in spirituality

In the epoch of collective life in Altai, as part of the USSR, there were big collective farms, and their collective farmers were the determining economic power in agriculture. The crash of the socialist way of economy brought the crash of the materialistic ideology, and along with good things we have gotten, we have lost a lot as well. During our childhoods we used to live together and do the work together, but we have lost a sense of Oneness. Why is it disappearing today? What do we have in store for us?

According to the old wisdom, we people should consider all the inhabitants of the Planet Earth as one big family, as one big collective. Ancient Turkic communities of Altai in the time of the Great tribe migration towards the West were the main defenders from any attacks, providing support on both the material and spiritual levels. In Medieval times the Zaisan was ruling, supporting, directing people. All modern attempts to revive Zaisans as rulers are just political, formal games. Today individualism is being developed everywhere, even in our villages. Families do not communicate with each other as much as they used to; they forget their roots. People have become lonelier and more separated; not many believe in Oneness... Where is the way out? Maybe in a good combination of individualism and collectivism?!

Spiritual and material destination of man

The world which people call the “other world,” “subtle world,” or “parallel world,” is considered by most people as “not real spiritual world.” This world is based on spirits--invisible rays--“chyok,” and we visit this world when we are sleeping. This world has given knowledge, feelings, and a soul to each individual. Faith in the spiritual world is more important than all the ceremonies we are doing. The soul goes to this spiritual world after the death of a person. What is life, generally speaking? Life is the existence of spirit and soul in a body and outside of the body. Bilik

gives the following list of the life destinations:

- 1) Life itself is the first destination of a human being in a living body.
- 2) Good and evil things are very much mixed in this world, so victory of goodness over evil is the second destination of a human being.
- 3) To leave something visible for the people when we leave the physical world is the third destination of a human being.

The destination has been put into “Suus” (spirit, gene) in the Sky (Burkan), but it doesn’t mean that a man is in complete dependence on what has been given from the Upper World. The meaning and the purpose of his life very much depends on his own personality, because a human being is like God, similar to God and should have a plan for his life on the level of thought. People say: “Actions come after thought.”

“According to Altai wisdom, the human body is considered to be of God’s origin, while the soul is of Erlik’s (evil God) origin. From the Bilik point of view, we can understand this as an idea about the soul originating from the invisible rays-spirits. It means that the Sky has not only a positive charge, but a negative charge as well, which appeared in the Polar star domain. The character of a newborn baby and of all the living world on the planet depend on their interactions during the new moon and old moon days. Without this opposition, life and development are not possible, and this natural opposition explains the oppositions and events happening in the lives of nations. There are many proofs that in the course of Altai history that inter-rotations of the ideals have changed now and then. For example, the Turkic nomads were invaders, but they did not kill most of the local people during their invasion in Altai; what they wanted was recognition as winners. Why were they merciful? Because they had Ulala in their souls (mind and feelings/consciousness and spirituality harmonizing). It was the period when the East was conquering the West. Later, the West began conquering the East, bringing some good as well as a lot of harm. Socialism had some similarity with the ancient communities, but was destroyed by inner and outer oppositions. The Middle world gets rays-spirits from the Upper world as well as from the Lower world; they do not destroy each other completely.

What is spirituality?

According to Bilik, spirituality includes the inner state of the soul of an individual as well as of a society as a whole. It includes faith, religion, all the knowledge, wisdom, skills and science – the whole culture. There is a great danger of losing spirituality and people's old wisdom, both in Russia and in the West today. That's why it is important to revive the knowledge of making contacts with the subtle world. The role of the people, born-shamans is increasing. He/she can send syulter (positive charge of the soul center) from the body to any place. The quality of a shaman's work with the subtle world very much depends on the level of the soul's spiritual education.

The quality of a shaman's work with the subtle world very much depends on the level of the soul's spiritual education.

Kyogyus (inner spirituality) depends on the quality of chakra contacts with their suluzuns (points on the body). In old time, buttons on the clothes symbolized suluzun of the person. It is important to develop kyogus from childhood.

Most native people of Altai recognize the significance of praying before sacred mountains, before fire (which is very much respected in Altaian culture), and before standing ritual stones (Mengirs). Should we speak only about religion, while speaking about spirituality? We believe that today it is extremely important to revive old pagan knowledge. In many cases science is not able to explain many phenomena, and scientists often proclaim that these phenomena do not exist--it is people's imagination--while old wisdom explains most of the processes and phenomena.

According to Bilik, mind, feelings and consciousness exist in space as energy, consisting of five kinds of rays (spirits), which have no form but have all the features of the living entities. From them souls emerge, which get coats/coverings of substances of six elements: earth, water, air, fire, wood/plant, and metal. After death the soul loses its former form, and within time it disappears and turns into formless energy. The souls of outstanding people do not lose their form, and these people often come in dreams to their relatives for a long time.

Kan-Altai is known as "terra incognita". What differentiates Altai from other regions?

From ancient times people here worshipped not one God, as in most countries. God Ulgen-energy of positive charge) and Erlik as opposition, then Tengeri (sky--Burkan, keeper of suus). Then came the time of Uch-Kurbustan (with the Om--old moon power). Along with him, people worshipped Altai-Kudai (honest and just – "my God with many images.")

Today Altai people worship Altai-Kudai as power-energy of the white Tom (new moon, honesty, kindness, justice), which is why the faith is called "White faith." Some people worship Uch-Kurbustan--energy of old moon 'Om,' and some people follow one of the three world recognized religions. But different ways of faith do not mean absence of Unity of Altai people, because we all have one and the same root-ancient tribes (Turgut-jele). So, we have one common spirituality –Tyes (Spirit of Motherland-Indigenous land). In future, Kan Altai can become a region where White faith and three world religions will find a mutual concord.

We can find a similar notion to White faith in Mayan philosophy and in Nostradamus' predictions, who said: "From Altai, White faith will spread and will overwhelm the minds of half of humanity."

Ulgen-God of all the Gods

The author gives an interesting legend of how the spirits of space - Ulgen and Mongyzyn (Dragon) came together and how the Universe was created. To start life, Ulgen created Tengeri (the Sky), and from Tengeri all other deities came to life. Then the history of worshipping and making kam by shamans is given.

Bilik says that cognizing spirituality is an endless process; it is eternal, and the messenger of Ulgen-Ulu-Kegen is the spirit of knowledge. The spiritual development in the white epoch has

three trends: two opposite trends and one in the middle. In the 20th century Ulgen was almost forgotten.

Appearance of the White faith is inevitable

People who follow ideas of paganism are not free in everything; they have many taboos, and these taboos keep a person from breaking rules of morality--they show the right direction. Morality brings up spirituality, and this is a basis of the White faith. People who shared the ideas of other faiths were not able to defend their faiths, they were not able to renew them, taking into consideration the new time reality (the beginning of the 21st century). They were not able to give a basis for contacts with parallel world; whereas the White faith seems to be more sustainable because it has a great spiritual basis in Bilikism.

The emergence of the White faith was inevitable, because its aim is to renew Altaian Universal wisdom, which is a teaching for differentiating goodness and evil. The White faith was in the process of developing in the period from the 16th century up to the 18th century. Russian troops did not interfere in the fighting between tribes and nations: those who came to Altai and those who lived there, trying to defend their old faith. That was one of the reasons why Altai chose to join Russia 250 years ago. But the Christian church was very much oppressing the Altai faith. In old times it was forbidden even to mention White faith and Bilik. After this hard time of oppression the White faith started "to raise its head" at the end of the 20th century.

Influence of the rays--spirits of the Sky and the Earth on Bilik and the White faith

According to Bilik rays-spirits are magnetized to each other and influence each other. In the sky as well as on the Earth, goodness and evil exist close to each other, but the Celestial power corrects a man, pulling him towards the Heavens, while mundane evil destroys a man, because a dark soul is attracted to evil. A man is not free of the influence from the Sky and from the Earth. Atheists extol the power-energy of a man, while idealists worship only the Spirit of Goodness. Bilikists are looking for the middle way, they trying to cognize the rays-spirits as living entities, but they do not want to lose their own destination of a human being. We believe, that the most fruitful will be an idea of Bilikism of harmonizing mind and feelings, consciousness with spirituality without going from one extreme to another. Bilikists of former times tried to follow the way of peace and harmony between the fighting tribes (Oskus-Uul, Oirod –Kaan). Oirod –Kaan was a creator of the Book of Tanza laws (the highest knowledge, justice), but at that time that Book was considered to be a utopia. The ideas of those laws became the basic ideas of Bilik.

Galina Ermolina (Novosibirsk, Russia)