

Sarangerel Odigon was an American of Mogolian descent. As an adult she returned to live in the place of her ancestors and studied Mongolian shamanism for many years. She travelled across the globe passing on the teachings of her people to all who wanted to learn them. Sadly, earlier this year she passed into spirit.

Originally **Macca McCabe** had connected with her via the Internet, but this contact had eventually broken down, and so, not knowing who I was going to meet or how I was going to meet them I set off on his trip into the

LAND OF THE ETERNAL BLUE SKY



In 1998, via the internet, Sarangerel invited shamanic practitioners across the world to attend the annual Summer Solstice celebration in Mongolia.

Although I had originally been in direct contact with her through the Golomet Centre for Shamanic Studies website, this contact had now broken down. And so when I set off to take up the invitation I had only the barest details - a post office box number and a phone number that I had tried from England but which had given me an automatic voice telling me that there was no such number. But with belief in my spirits, who had told me to do the whole trip overland, the journey went according to plan, trains were on time and every connection was where and when it should be.

Eventually I arrived by train in Ulaanbaatar. With Zaya, my Mongolian guide, I went to the main post office in Ulaanbaatar to ask about the post office box. It was apparently owned by a company that had nothing to do with the Golomet Centre. My last resort was to try the phone number once again. The woman behind the post office counter told me that it was a mobile phone number, kindly tried it for me, and it worked. Even better, the man on the other end of the phone spoke English.

When I explained I was there for the ceremonies, he gave me an address and told me to meet him there the next evening at six-thirty.

So next day I duly arrived about ten minutes early at a big public building and found the room he had said to meet him in. The people in there had not heard of the Golomet Centre and Zaya and I tried many other rooms with similar numbers in case we had made a mistake, but could not find our contact.

As a last resort I went back to the first room. A man who had not been there the first time turned to me and said "Ah, you must be Mr McCabe."

He spoke good English, and introduced himself as Tomoro Tomoromunkh, the head of the Mongolian Liberal Democratic Party. He explained he had lent his internet site to the Golomet Centre while he had been in the US, and was now home for the Mongolian elections.

He offered to put me in touch with Sarangerel and the Golomet Centre, and introduced me to one of his aides who would call me sometime the next afternoon.

The next afternoon came, but no phone call, so I decided I would go back to the room where I had met Tomoro again. I felt as if I was being tested by the spirits, but I had come so far and I wasn't going to give up. When I arrived I was in luck, as Tomoro was there and he told me I was fortunate, as Sarangerel was coming back from Buryatia that very day. "Come back and have lunch and meet her" he said.

As soon Sarangerel and I met, we struck up a friendship, and I knew we would work well together. She showed me the typical kindness of both Mongolia and America and after lunch, we went to the main *oboo* or sacred cairn in the centre of Ulaanbaatar.

When people are travelling and they come to an *oboo*, they find three stones and then they walk around the *oboo* three times placing a stone onto the pile each time they go round. Over time, as people repeatedly do this, the *oboo* gets larger and larger.

Oboo usually have a stake at their centre decorated with ribbons which are mainly blue. These ribbons are to call the blessings of the spirits. Some *oboo* are also decorated with prayer flags, the 'windhorse' flags of the Tibetans. As the wind blows the flags, the prayers written on them spread out into the world.

I was amazed to find a shamanic shrine in the middle of a capital city where anyone could go and conduct a shamanic ceremony.

Sarangerel had come to the *oboo* to thank the spirits for bringing her safely there from Buryatia for the Solstice ceremonies that would be held over the next few days. When she began the ceremony at the *oboo* it was bitterly cold and raining hard, but as her ceremony continued, the clouds above us opened and the sun came through and it became warm. When I looked around it was only above the *oboo* that the sun was shining, the rest of the city was still covered with clouds and rain. Sarangerel had earlier explained that some of her helpers were weather helpers, and that the weather always breaks for her in ceremony.

The day before the main ceremony, Sarangerel and I went

to visit the site where the ceremonies would be held. We went to Bumbat, a small place near Ulaanbaatar, to visit both the main shaman's tree where the ceremonies would take place, and a female shaman's tree.

Most of the trees in this area have branches that grow straight upwards, but every now and again, you come across a tree with branches that come out of the sides and then grow up. These are shaman's trees, and it does of course make it easier to hang the ribbons on the branches.

The main tree had obviously been used for many years and had ribbons hanging all over it. This was the first tree we would work with the following day, and Sarangerel wanted to get a sense of both the trees and also gather some power for the following day's ceremony. So I lent the two Mongolians who had come with us a rattle each so that we could all call on the spirits.

I had met the main shaman of the Golomet Centre, a man called Byambadorj, the day before. He was from a particular area in the west of Mongolia, where shamanism is still strong and whose shamans were known to be the most powerful of all the Mongol shamans. My impression of him was that he was a man of humble power.

The main blessings Mongolians use, *Koke Monke Tengeri* translates as 'the eternal Blue Sky', and it really is blue sky in Mongolia, it is known as the land of the blue sky.

Everything that is blessed is also given to the blue sky, and as we sat with Byambadorj in his office, vodka was passed around before conducting a friendship and meeting ceremony. The vodka was blessed and flicked to the four corners of the room as a blessing, and then thrown to the blue sky above. As we all sat there talking, the vodka slowly dripped from the ceiling all over us and I supposed we all got blessed by it too.

On the first day of the ceremonies, in the evening, we met about a quarter of a mile from the trees at an *oboo*. When we arrived, Byambadorj had already been there for some time and had set up his *ongon* (which is both an



Above: Ulaanbaatar the capital of Mongolia sitting below the hills it is built near

*With belief in my spirits,
who had told me to do
the whole trip overland,
the journey went according
to plan, trains were on time
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where and when it should be*

*Below: Now a busy city, Ulaanbaatar
is a place of traffic and fumes,
but the past is still present, ger tents
nestle at the back of houses (bottom)*





A shaman's tree richly decorated with sky-blue silk hadag scaevles in honour of the spirits

altar and a place for containing spirits). Many ribbons fluttered from his coat, stretching from his shoulders to his heavy deer-fur boots. When we arrived, he got out his drum, which was quite large. As was typical of the ceremonies, there seemed lots of wandering around and everything was taking a long time, when suddenly... BANG, the drum started. He called the spirits, and called blue sky for blessing, and for the ceremony we were going to perform.

Suddenly we were actually in ceremony, and the drum was very loud as Byambadorj moved around the *oboo* calling the spirits from the different directions. After he had done this, another man - not a shaman - stepped forward and shot three arrows off far away to the West. Each arrow was sent further than the previous one, and after the last was shot, everyone present cheered. I never really found out what that was about.

Then, half a cooked sheep that had been offered to the spirits, and which had been placed on the *oboo*, was cut up and given to the people to eat. I had been told by my spirits to fast for the day's ceremonies and was only taking water. It was very hard to refuse the hospitality of the Mongols, and I had to taste a few morsels just to keep them happy.

The next day the ceremonies were to take place around noon, the first one being at the main tree. Lots of local people from Ulaanbaatar started to arrive for the

ceremony, and this time a female shaman, called Sumya, joined Byambadorj. She put on her regalia, fur boots, a fur cone-shaped hat and her long blue coat with many coloured ribbons hanging from it.

When I looked closer at these ribbons, I saw they were narrow tubes packed with fabric and was told they represented snakes, although I knew there are few actual snakes in the area.

I wasn't sure whether I was meant to take part in the ceremony or not and after more confused preamble Byambadorj went over to the tree and walked around it calling to the spirits. I was told I could be part of the ceremony, but by then it was already happening, and I had left my drum down by the second tree ready for the second ceremony.

Sarangerel and Sumya were sitting drumming as Byambadorj went around calling to the spirits and circling the tree. I decided to

take part by sitting to one side, and putting power into the circle around the tree in the hope that this would help.



After the ceremony at the first

tree we all moved down to the other tree where Sarangerel had set up her *ongon*, her spirit place.

I started to get into my shamanic gear and prepare myself. Sumya joined us too, but it was Sarangerel who led this ceremony that she had devised to help the Mongol people. She especially wanted to help those around lake Baikal, which is in



Left: The shaman Byambadorj in his ritual costume

Right: A Mongolian archer shoots an Arrow



Left: Sarangerel makes prayers to the spirits while Macca drums for her during the ceremony

Below: An altar at the ceremony with offering for the Spirits



Russia. These Mongols seemed to be suffering at the hands of the Russians and she told me that the Mongols in China were also suffering at the hands of the Chinese. So this ceremony was to ask for blessing for all the Mongol people, especially those outside of Mongolia. I felt very honoured to be asked to assist her with this ceremony.

Initially Sarangerel called to her spirit helpers and asked them to help her; then she went around the tree once, with me following her, drumming. I had to keep up the drumming all the way through the whole ceremony, maintaining a steady monotonous beat, whilst she sent blessings to the Mongol people. As we circled the tree a second and third time, I noticed that my drumming gradually went faster. Then she picked up her own drum and began to call to her spirits once again.

As we drummed, I looked up into the tree and saw a beautiful woman dressed in white, obviously the spirit of this female shaman's tree. I could sense many other spirits gathered there as well. Towards the end of the ceremony I felt a considerable amount of power being poured into me, which I passed on to the Mongolian people and I went around the circle drumming to them and pouring the power I felt into them. I was glad to be able to do something for these people who had shown me such friendliness and warmth.

It was interesting to watch the reactions of the shamans to the spirits around them. The only spirit I actually saw was the maiden in white, but later when Sarangerel asked me how many spirits I saw during the ceremony I replied seven, three of which were hers. Although I didn't physically 'see' the six spirits, I realised I had sensed them, and for me this was another step in my shamanic path.

The day after the ceremony the main tree we had worked around was struck with lightning and set on fire, and had to be put out with water; the next day the same thing happened to the female shaman's tree. These lightning strikes were special for the Mongolians, and even more so for me, as one of my main spirit helpers is the Maiden of the Lightning.

I feel, due to Sarangerel's help, and being, and working with her

both before and after the main ceremonies, that I returned from Mongolia a better person, and I am grateful to her for that.

Macca has been studying and practising shamanism since 1992, mainly working with Jonathan Horwitz who he also assists on workshops periodically. He has also worked with Pomo as well as other Native American medicine people, as well as shamans in Mongolia. He lives and practices in Cheshire, England and is a member of the Core Shamanic Practitioners Circle. Email: maccamccabe@uwclub.co.uk www.shamanicpractitioners.org.uk

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Photo of Sarangerel on this page courtesy of Llyn Roberts



Sarangerel Odigon 1963 - 2006

Saraa passed into spirit following a heart attack on February 28th of this year.

She was the author of two books on Tengerism (Mongolian shamanism). and was the founder of Golomt Tuv, the Mongolian shaman's association, a member of Buryat shaman association and a founding member of Circle of Tengerism, the Mongolian shaman association in North America.

Born Mongol in the US on August 20, 1963, Sarangerel later went to live in Mongolia, Buryatia and Tuva. She worked tirelessly to restore and reconstruct the ancient and the original belief system of the Mongols and to reintroduce it to the people around the globe. As a scholar and lecturer, and as the foreign outreach officer of Golomt Tuv, she travelled back and forth between Mongolia and the West, giving lectures and workshops.

A tribute page can be found on the Circle of Tengerism website, www.tengerism.org and a collection of letters and articles remembering Sarangerel are due to be put on this site soon.

'I have heard it said that the soul does not measure time, it merely records growth I did a lot of growing in the two weeks I worked with her. I thank you Sarangerel. It was an honour and a pleasure to have met you.' Macca

Her sister, Chonobaatar wrote *'Saraa was a great Mongolian patriot and believed in pan-Mongolism and cared about all Mongols no matter what country they lived in, Her favorite place was the majestic Sayan mountains and I believe that her soul shall rest there.'*

