

# Shamanic Cosmology Among the Tungus People of Eastern Siberia, Russia

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Throughout one's entire life, one forms some pattern of the world that he represents. The traditional pattern of the world of those peoples who speak Tungus languages (that is, the peoples known as Even and Evenk) was formed under the influence of their religious beliefs and conceptions. It is precisely their family-tribal conceptions and rules, as well as individual experiences and feelings, that formed the traditional world view of the Even and the Evenk. The most important layer of the religious views held by the Even and Evenk was certainly shamanism, with its developed pantheon of pagan deities and spirits. These deities and spirits personify the powers of nature. All of them originated with the creator of the universe (in Even: *Nalban Omgo Ogyu Buga*, by the single most powerful deity, who is called *Hovky-Sovky* in the Even language and *Shavaky-Savaky* in Evenk. Each people imagines all three shamanic worlds. In general, according to the views of the Even and Evenk, the world consists of the physical sphere and two others: the Upper World, known as *Dulyu Buga* and the Lower World, known as *Hargy Buga*.

According to information gathered from the Tungus shamans Sabei, M. P. Kul'bertinova, S. S. Krivoshapkin, and others, the Upper World was represented as the antlers of the reindeer or the elk. There were three heavenly levels of the Upper World: the seventh heaven, the ninth heaven and

the twelfth heaven. The shamans were also divided accordingly into the seventh heaven, the ninth heaven, and the twelfth heaven known as *yja*. This name means “of reindeer’s (or elk’s) antlers.” The highest level in the shamanic cosmology of the Tungus is the twelfth heaven or twelve heavenly antlers, or *yja*, which can be conditionally divided into 3 shamanic levels:

1. The first level consists of seven heavenly layers or spheres of the reindeer’s antlers *yja*;
2. The second level consists of nine heavenly layers or spheres of the reindeer’s antlers *yja*;
3. The third level consists of twelve heavenly layers or spheres of the reindeer’s antlers *yja*.

To be a shaman of the seventh heaven, the person chosen by spirits passes a trial and is dedicated to the mysterious knowledge found in the seventh heaven (that is, within the first shamanic level) of the reindeer’s antlers, or *yja*. This is a simple shaman, called *ychan* or clairvoyant.

The materials of a Siberian ethnographer show that the connection between the image of the elk or reindeer and that of the sun and the universe represents one of the ancient elements of the cosmological conceptions of Siberian peoples. While analysing information gathered during my field research, I heard about the connection of the universe with the reindeer’s and the elk’s antlers for the first time, information that was provided by the above-mentioned Even and Evenk (Tungus) shamans of Yakutia. As further evidence, I can note an Even children’s game, called “Utukan,” in which the winner is declared master of the gifts of the universe.

In the Even and Evenk systems, the shaman of the ninth heaven is called *Abyka*. In total, there are  $(7+9+12)=28$  layers of the Upper World. The shaman of the twelfth heaven, who is a great shaman named Markha, is

dedicated to the mysterious knowledge of the universe. The Lower World is called *Hargy Buga* (*Harhu*). According to Tungus mythology, the Lower World is also divided into three levels.

The shamans of the Lower World, like the shamans of the Upper World, are also divided into three categories: the seventh level, the ninth level, and the twelfth level of the Lower World. Just as the Upper World, so too is there a total of 28 layers (shamanic 'lands') of the Lower World.

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