

*The master of my furnace is radiant sky
The master of my bellows is black, like coal.
A brisk hammer and anvil are a help of my right hand
Heavy tongs of silver are a help of my left hand*

SPiRiT OF THE BLACKSMITH

*An introduction to Damjin Dorlig, the
Southern Siberian and Central Asian
shaman blacksmith spirit*

Nicholas Breeze Wood



Statue of
Damchen
Garwa Nagpo
Probably from
the area of
Dolonnor
in Inner
Mongolia

Gilt copper
and pigment
17.75cm high
Late C18th

The blacksmith spirit appears in all the cultures which have worked with iron - a fundamental figure in mythology, right across the world, and from far distant times.

My spirits introduced me to Damjin Dorlig, a Southern Siberian blacksmith spirit, by a roundabout set of 'coincidences'.

It all started a few years ago, during a day spent with a shamanic peer group, where I made a shamanic journey to ask my spirits if they had anything they wanted to show or tell me at that time.

During the journey a spirit, who I thought was a Tibetan Buddhist protector being I recognised as Dorje Legpa, appeared; I found myself being given unexpectedly a traditional Tibetan empowerment ceremony into what I thought was his practice.

That evening, eager to find out a bit more about Dorje Legpa I asked a Buddhist friend about him. He told me that the famous Tibetan Buddhist master, Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, was giving a 'transmission' (a traditional form of empowerment) for Dorje Legpa the next day, and I could take part in it if I wished to.

But I still had no idea as to why Dorje Legpa had apparently come into my life.

The first chance I had, I journeyed again to my spirit helpers, to ask them for more information about Dorje Legpa, and they gave me a short phrase which they told me to 'Google.'

When I did so, I swiftly came to a reference about a Buryat and Mongolian shamanic blacksmith spirit called Damjin Dorlig. Damjin Dorlig (spellings vary across Siberia and Central Asia) is not only responsible for everything related to metalwork, he is also the spirit keeper of all machines and electricity too.

The Buddhists of Tibet and Central Asia adopted many existing shamanic spirits, Damjin Dorlig included. He is known by Tibetan Buddhists as Damchen Garwa Nagpo and sometimes Dorje Legpa¹.

I come from a long line of family blacksmith ancestors, but I had never been drawn to smithing, and felt no connection to Damjin Dorlig. But I accepted that the spirits knew best and awaited developments...

THUNDERBOLT COINCIDENCES

Again I asked my spirits for more information, and they said that a miniature set of iron blacksmithing tools, which all Buryat shamans have, and which I had been given many years ago, were the special tools of Damjin Dorlig. Later, I discovered a film on YouTube² in which a Buryat shaman talks about these tools and how they belong to Damjin Dorlig, explaining the use of each one.

These miniature tools are generally fixed to a special wand-like whip shamans carry called a *bardag*, which is used for healing and blessing. They often contain such items as miniature anvils, bellows and hammers, as well as weapons and other tools the shaman may need, such as a sword, a bow and arrow, an axe, magical keys to any lock, and even sometimes a boat, a ladder, and many other implements.

Part of a song from one Buryat shaman states *"If cliffs and rocks appear, the ladder puts me through, If lakes or rivers appear, the rowboat takes me to the other side."*

My spirits also told me I should obtain a small iron thunderbolt to wear around my neck.

I understood my spirits had meant a small iron Tibetan dorje, (which represents a thunderbolt). I looked everywhere but I had no luck finding one. So eventually I asked a Mongolian friend if he could find me one in Mongolia. He asked me why, so I told him of my encounter with Damjin Dorlig. His reply was "There is something you don't know about me! For many years I was a smith, and I worked with the spirit Damjin Dorlig every day!"

He arranged for a small iron dorje to be made for me by a blacksmith in Ulaanbaatar who makes ritual objects for shamans. That dorje - which is not one suitable to be worn - is now on my altar in front of the statue of Damjin Dorlig.

The trail didn't end there. A little after this, I went on a Buddhist retreat, totally unconnected to Dorje Legpa. Sitting down to lunch, the man seated opposite asked me, completely out of the blue, if I knew anything about Dorje Legpa? He told me that he came from Finland, and a lot of his friends there thought

that Dorje Legpa was a manifestation of Thor, the Norse god. Several months later I bought an iron Thor's hammer amulet, feeling drawn to it. When I put it around my neck, I recalled my conversation over lunch and remembered the fact that Thor's 'hammer' was a thunderbolt. I fell about laughing at the realisation - my iron thunderbolt had arrived after all! And what better symbol for a blacksmith spirit than a hammer?

The spirits then told me I should learn blacksmithing, because Damjin Dorlig was going to be a major spirit helper for me. I found a blacksmith teacher, who had a keen interest in Iron Age and tribal smithing and artifacts, living just a few miles away.

THE SACRED BLACKSMITH

In Hindu mythology, Tvastar, or Vishvakarma as he is sometimes known, is the blacksmith of the gods, whereas Vulcan (Hephaestus) holds that role in Greek and Roman mythology, using as he does a volcano as his forge.

In ancient Irish mythology, the sacred smith is Goibhniu, and in Wales he is Gofannon. Both of these names mean blacksmith in their respective languages.

In Anglo-Saxon Northern Europe, Wayland the Smith, who is known in Old Norse as Völundr, is the heroic blacksmith, who has many legends associated with him.

Traditionally in Siberia and Central Asia, the blacksmith is a very important person, closely related to the shaman; one Siberian saying is - 'the shaman and the blacksmith are from the same nest' - which sums it up well.

The blacksmith makes many of the shamans' tools and pieces of equipment. He is the armourer of the shaman, and the iron objects fixed onto shamans' coats or carried by them, are their armour and weapons. In Buryat tradition, such a smith and maker of shaman's objects is called *Dorligtoi xün* - 'a person with Dorlig.'

According to Buryat legend, blacksmiths were taught by spirits from heaven called tengers, who were sent down to the earth to

Left: set of shaman's miniature blacksmith tools Buryat C20th

Below: Evenk blacksmith making metal items for a shaman Photo 1908





Above: Tibetan thangka painting of Damchen Garwa Nagpo

Below: iron objects on the coat of a Buryat or Evenk shaman Late C19th



tools and weapons, being honoured for their work and their skill.

Iron was considered magical in its own right, but the smiths worked with other, non-ferrous, metals too. These smiths, like shamans, are divided into two groups: 'white' and 'black.' Black smiths generally forge articles from iron, the 'black metal', and their work includes domestic items, such as axes, knives and parts for horses' harnesses, as well as shoeing horses. They also make the shamans' items related to Damjin Dorlig such as metal parts for the shaman's costumes, and iron parts for drums.

White smiths are those who tend to work with non-ferrous and precious metals, and their shamanic work would include making brass and bronze ritual mirrors, and the casting of amulets and bells.

DAMJIN DORLIG IN TIBET

When Buddhism came to Tibet in the C8th CE there was already an ancient shamanic culture and a rich family of shamanic spirits there.

Legend has it that the Tantric Buddha Padmasambhava, who brought the teachings to Tibet and surrounding regions, travelled all over the land subduing these ancient spirits and making them take a vow to be protectors of Buddhism from that moment onwards. These protectors are known as *Dharmapala* (Oath-bound protectors of the Dharma, the Buddhist teachings).

This was true of the blacksmith spirit too, who became known as Damchen Garwa Nagpo who acts as a protector of Buddhism. He is also regarded as a mountain spirit with a mountain in North East Tibet sacred to him. His spirit comes into the bodies of shaman-like Buddhist oracles, through whom he gives advice and guidance. Some famous historical oracles who embodied him were reputed to be able to melt iron in their bare hands, just by holding it while in trance, when Damjin Dorlig had come into them.

As a protector there are many examples of Damjin Dorlig being used in protection rituals. Here is an extract of one such Buddhist ritual:

*Invoke Damjin.
Visualise yourself as*

*the powerful victor.
Wear a black costume.
Tie your hair on top
of your head.
Wave a magical baton
in the four directions.
Imagine the mighty divine
protectors loudly calling
out to the enemy.
Seek the testimony.
Attest to your innocence.
Let Damjin precisely know
the obstructers that are to
be targeted with maledictions.
Entrust Damjin with the
slaughter of the enemy.
Prepare burning goat fat
and incense.
Sprinkle offerings in
the four directions.
Ask Damjin - 'the rider of the
tiger' - and his retinue to
come to this place.
Play the drum and bell, hold aloft
a victory banner, blow the conch
trumpet, and melodically
chant "You must slay and
devour this evil-doing enemy."
Then, like this, Damjin
is called to action.*

FORGING WITH DAMJIN

I have no wish nor aptitude to become a blacksmith, but working with the element of fire and iron was a powerful experience. It does not need huge amounts of strength or skill to make *something*, and it is very rewarding to shape hot iron.

When I set out to learn blacksmithing, my spirits instructed me to make a set of iron spirit traps, for use in a specific healing ceremony that I use sometimes. I was not able to do all the work on the traps myself, it was too technical, so Aaron, my local blacksmith teacher, was more than happy to help me with the bits that were out of my ability zone.

I continue to work with Damjin Dorlig, making regular offerings of incense and vodka to him, and journeying to meet him and receive teachings and instructions. My spirits told me to get an *ongon* (spirit house, fetish or statue) of him for my altar. This was fairly easy to find, and I was able to get a Buddhist statue of him sitting on his red goat with horns of twisted iron.

MAKING AN IRON DRUM

About a year prior to writing this article, I had a 'big' dream in which a shaman from Northern China clearly



told me to make an iron- framed drum. These drums are used in some shamanic traditions in Inner Mongolia and North East China. I often have very deep and vivid shamanic dreams, receiving teachings, performing healings and working with Mongolian shamans, so this was not too out of the ordinary for me, and I have learnt to take note of these dreams.

As I had been so clearly instructed to make the drum, I asked my spirits about it the next day, and they agreed wholeheartedly that I should make it and added that I should also have a set of iron antlers (*orgay*) made for me at the same time. These iron, or sometimes copper, antlers are a traditional part of the ritual equipment of many Siberian shamans, from the Buryats in Russia to shamans in Central Siberia, and eastwards to Northern China and Manchuria.

It took me almost another year to manage to arrange for time at the forge, and when I did, these two items were made mostly by Aaron, my teacher; I acted as his assistant at the forge. They were made with ceremony and offerings to Damjin Dorlig, both in preparation at my house and at the forge before we started work each day.

I am currently being taught about how to use these two new sacred objects by my spirit helpers.

I have written this account of the series of 'synchronicities' that connected me to this blacksmith spirit, and because I hear fewer stories from people who work with other, more archetypal spirits. My spirits tell me that Damjin Dorlig

has come into my life because of my deep love for ritual objects. I do know it has been quite a powerful encounter for me, and one that is still evidently unfolding; and where it will take me next I cannot really hazard a guess...

NOTES:

1: In Buddhism, Damchen Garwa Nagpo and Dorje Legpa are sometimes seen as the same being, but sometimes Damchen Garwa Nagpo is seen as a spirit helper of Dorje Legpa, one of his entourage.

2: Youtube Film:
www.bit.ly/Buryat-Bardag

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Top: Aaron (top) and the author working on the iron drum and *orgay* at Aaron's forge

Below Left: iron shaman's drum from Northern China

Below: iron *orgay*, made by Aaron, complete coloured silk khadags representing the elements

