The Altaic Creation Story

Adapted by Gene Doty from the prose translation by Gülten Yener

"Umay Goddess."

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Endless Water

God Need Not Fear

Ak-ana Emerges

Loneliness Flees

Endless Water

Now there is no earth,

there s only water, only endless water

clear to the four corners of nothing.

If Snake drank this water,

Death would fall from him;

if Scorpion, dead, drank it,

he would live again, rise

in a spatter of light.

The water shakes with the silence

of unknown sounds,

sounds that haven't yet been heard.

All this endless, all this useless water!

The Snake that drank would be deathless--

but there is yet no Snake, no Scorpion.

Within this brightness,

within this blankness,

is only God Kara-han,

the Gander flying lonely, [1]

flying lonely above the water.

Above the waters, twisting mist

scented with colors not yet seen,

God Kara-han flies white and lonely;

No sound yet nor breath

but the eternal flutter

of the Gander's flight, the ham-sa,

ham-sa of his beating wings.

The empty, lonely, quaking waters

became a mist, a mist that entered,

thin and warm, the Gander s heart;

the Gander's wings drove him on--

will Time come to free him from flight?

Nothing.

No song.

No love.

Deadly chains, loose and broken,

rings in the water,

rings of disorder.

Will Space come to free the Gander,

to free God Kara-han from watery chaos?

Endless rings of ringing water

spread then to Time,

Time whose mouth is a blood-soaked rose.

God Kara-han,

godly Gander, flew in fear

of the unknown depths,

of unseen drunken, unseen enchanted,

unseen things in the lonely water.

God Need Not Fear

The godly Gander flew without stop,

flew without rest, flew without clinging

to any place;

flying so,

flying without love, without trust,

God Kara-han trembled

in his godly flight,

and his trembling churned, it shook, the water,

the water flared, then folded darkly,

the water swelled and flowed to the pace

of God Kara-han's flight:

"I am God,

I need not tremble.

I am God,

I shall not fear."

Ak-ana Emerges

Yet the water did not calm,

it stirred within itself,

the water within the waters

moved and parted, the waters folded open

and from the deeps of the deeps,

a voice, a breath, a breath of voice

rose and crooned: [2]

"Kara-han,

God

Kara-han,"

the voice spread to the ends

of the endless water:

"Oneness becomes you

God Kara-han,

Oneness is godly,

O godly Gander."

God Kara-han's eyes trembled like water,

his wings stretched down

to the water's mouth:

"Who are you, speaking?

Where are you, speaking?

I who am God,

I ask,

who are you, speaking?"

Time escaped the Gander's wings,

rushing forth, breaking loose;

the water sang a crown for Time;

Time fell naked to the open water.

The opened water wavered brightly

and bright Ak-ana rose in brightness,

rose from the water's quaking mouth.

Time was silence.

God Kara-han's open mouth

was like the water Time opened.

Ak-ana's brightness

brought the ends of endless water

close to her, close to her beauty.

Her beauty flattened the water,

confused the Gander:

"Who are you?

I who am God

do not know you.

Are you spirit? Are you person?

Who are you,

bright and shining?"

Together they shone,

together the brightness of Ak-ana

and God kara-han shone:

"I am Ak-ana, water's sister,

I am your creature whom you forget."

Had the endless water

been endless wine,

God Kara-han would not have been more drunk.

Ak-ana's voice was the breeze

of summer evenings,

her eyes were deeper than water,

longer than Time:

"You, God Kara-han,

even you can forget,

have forgotten water's sister.

Before you flew,

I was not.

Then I saw your flight,

your bored and lonely flight."

"Speak, bright woman;

in your voice, loneliness is mist

that fades in the sun;

in your eyes boredom is beauty's shadow.

Bright woman, speak!"

Ak-ana's voice shivered bitterly:

"You are God,

single and godly,

Oneness becomes you,

but Oneness is lonely,

Singleness boring."

"I who am God

am God, yes, but who calls me God,

who knows I am who am God?

Endless waters,

above them I fly;

endless nothing,

below it I fly

There is no bottom to which I dive.

So what is it worth

that I am god?

"Answer me.

"When I saw you,

Time flew from my wings,

and Time and Water and I

now are ringed by loneliness."

Loneliness Flees

Ak-ana whispered:

"Create."

Water shivered, Time trembled

water and Time crushed loneliness between them,

loneliness fled at the word Create.

Eternity echoed in her voice,

her voice singed the Gander's wings:

"Create!

Create!

Create!"

The water wavered inward,

the water folded and Ak-ana sank again,

her brightness sinking in the deeps,

yet she left behind the sigh,

heard everywhere, the sigh:

"Create!

Create!

Create!"

God Kara-han created Er-kishi,

created Er-kishi, double and dark.

God Kara-han Gets Splashed

Shamans and

their animals.

"Shamans and Their Animals."

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Er-kishi Splashes God's Feathers

Er-kishi Falls

Er-kishi Dives

Er-kishi Spits

Er-kishi Fears

God Kara-han Speaks

Er-kishi Splashes God's Feathers

When there was no earth,

when there was nothing but endless water,

a gander flew, a gander whiter than milk,

a gander whiter than summer milk

flew by a gander darker than winter,

darker than cold.

Then there was no earth, no sun;

then there was no day, no moon;

then there were no stars, no Milky Way.

Then there was water, only water,

and above the water, two ganders flying--

God Kara-han flying,

Er-kishi flying, [1]

flying in the peace of unspoken love,

flying in the joy of endless being.

Then God Kara-han felt a cloud,

a knot of wind, a fist of water,

a cloud that formed in Er-kishi s heart

as Er-kishi flew just below him.

Feeling the cloud, God Kara-han wondered:

"Was loneliness better than dark Er-kishi?"

And Er-kishi bent his darkness

down to the water, seeming to drown,

and God Kara-han was sad;

but Er-kishi spun up at the surface,

his speed foaming the water,

whirling it up,

splashing the water on God Kara-han.

Er-kishi was proud of his dive and splash:

"Hey, God, now you see that I am strong;

without your leave, I chose to dive;

I dove and wet your feathers";

and Er-kishi thought, in his clouded heart:

"More will I do.

Instead of diving,

I will rise,

rise above the white gander."

Er-kishi Falls

But as Er-kishi thought to soar, [2]

God took his flight from his wings

and he plummeted down

with deadly Time trapped in his feathers.

Plummeting down, Er-kishi cried out

"My God!"

but water wrapped his tongue

and smothered his cry.

"My God, I did not know your strength;

Give me release

and I will give you praise."

God Kara-han spoke:

"Come out, then: Rise!

With soaking wings, Er-kishi rose

but could not fly,

could not rise from the water s grasp:

"Create me a place, O God!

Let me stand. The water is fearful;

its darkness will suck me down.

Create a place, just enough to stand.

I am afraid."

God said: "Let there be a strong rock."

His words searched the deeps

and searching found Ak-ana s ear,

found Ak-ana who created a rock

and sent it up for Er-kishi's place.

Er-kishi sat in the tent of silence

that was the world--

there was only water and only God--

being neither, Er-kishi feared,

feared that God s forgetful wing

would brush him off this tiny place,

brush him into the fearful deeps.

Er-kishi thought the rock should stretch,

should stretch and cover the endless water

and hide the water's terrible mouth.

Er-kishi Dives

At that instant, God Kara-han [2]

commanded Er-kishi to dive,

dive to the depths and bring up earth,

bring up a handful of dirt.

Er-kishi dove, dove in fear.

Where he dove he did not know;

where he dove had a light he did not know;

the light was the eyes of God Kara-han,

where he dove when he dove to the bottom,

was earth. He took a handful and rose.

"God, I did your command.

I beg you make this water above

Like the flatness below,

broad and wide, a place where I may live.

Now I am sure you are God,

now I know your godly strength."

God Kara-han commanded him:

"Throw the earth,

throw it on the water."

Er-kishi spilled his handful of earth,

spilled it on the water

where it spread to the end of sight

and even farther than sight it spread.

With shaking and clamor

eternity sucked the water down,

sucked it down to give earth room.

In spreading joy, Er-kishi said:

"God, my God,

surely you are God

surely you are the God I worship."

God said:

"If so, then dive, hey, Er-kishi,

dive again

and again bring up a handful of earth."

Er-kishi grew drunk

with new creation;

the cloud in his heart unfolded and fled

as he dove again to the God-bright bottom.

The water shook

with Er-kishi s joy,

with his drunken dive to the bottom.

The cloud knotted again,

made a dark fist in Er-kishi s heart:

"So if God,

if God cannot,

cannot get this earth,

if God must send me,

if his strength lacks,

my strength,

if my strength completes

the strength of God

then I am more than he,

then his godliness is less than mine."

Thinking these thoughts

Er-kishi filled his mouth with earth for himself

and took for God half of a half a handful.

Planning that God would create

half of a half a world

and he, Er-kishi, would create

a whole and secret world for himself.

Er-kishi Spits

God Kara-han looked at the dust,

the grains of dust in Er-kishi s hand,

and said only: "Throw this too,"

and when Er-kishi threw it,

God Kara-han made it grow,

made it spread wider than water and Time.

At the beginning there was Eternity,

after Eternity, there was Time;

now, after Time, Earth grew,

spreading out to make a place.

God s earth spread endlessly,

Er-kishi found no place to spit his earth,

no place beyond God and God s place,

God's water and Time.

Er-kishi's desire hardened to stone;

as it hardened, God spoke:

"Spit.

Spit and be saved, you who are evil.

Had I not listened

to Ak-ana's sigh,

Create!

you would not be,

nor your anger,

nor your lust

to be my equal.

Since I made,

I will save you.

Spit!"

Er-Kishi spit on God's flat, free earth;

the spit made hills,

hills like stumps of yellowed teeth,

made bogs like pus,

made a valley nasty as death.

Er-kishi looked

at the rotten growth of his spit,

and God Kara-han said:

"Hey, Er-kishi, I made a place for you;

see what your pride has done,

the cloud that spits from your evil heart."

Er-kishi replied:

"I wanted to make my own world,

a world where I would be God,

a world to escape you,

where I could have all power

and you would borrow power from me."

Er-Kishi Fears

The water twisted, God was silent;

God was silent, the earth shook.

Er-kishi thought God was weak:

"I should be creator not you;

you should dive at my command."

When he spoke, the hills were shamed,

the hills and water and marshes turned

to God for protection:

"O God, keep us from Er-kishi, double and dark.

We are not his, he is not ours."

Their words scratched Er-kishi

with lonely shame,

shame and fear spiked his heart,

his breath, his sight.

He grew pale, he grew dark;

he grew dark, he grew pale;

quivering, he turned completely to fear.

"Why do you fear?"

God's words fell soft and white,

fell like feathers from his flight:

"You created because I allowed it;

you created evil

because you are evil."

Er-kishi s feathers ruffled and stiffened:

"You!

you made me,

made me what I am.

If I am evil,

you made me evil

when you could have made me good.

Answer,

answer godly,

God."

The dark cloud knotted in Er-kishi s heart

spoke these words.

God Kara-han Speaks

God said:

"We flew together,

but in your pride

you wanted to fly above,

and from this pride,

your pride

your evil came,

not from me.

Is that godly enough?"

After these words, all was silent,

all was silent beyond silence,

and God s voice passed through silence:

"Under earth is water;

under water is earth; under all, darkness;

Into this darkness

you shall go,

beyond earth, beyond water,

beyond light.

Go!"

In the silence after God's voice,

Er-kishi fell,

fell to darkness unseen and untouched,

fell where eye saw no eye,

where knee touched no knee.

Falling from God

The Nine-Branched Tree.

"The Nine-Branched Tree"

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The Tree of Humanity

Er-Kishi's Envy

Temptation

Double and Dark

Eating the Fruit

The Tree of Humanity

In that darkness

Er-kishi's darkness darkened;

in that loneliness,

his loneliness grew lonelier yet.

A tree grew on the earth above, [1]

branchless, budless, leafless,

it grew greatly but God said:

"A tree should branch,

a tree should bud,

a tree should leaf;

let this tree bud and branch,

let it be green

from root to tip."

Then the tree grew full, grew bright,

grew full with the fullness

of God's eyes,

grew bright with the brightness

of God's eyes.

Nine times the tree branched:

three branches eastward,

three branches westward,

two branches southward,

one single branch northward,

one dry and yellow branch,

dry and hopeless, stretched north.

The tree spread its branches,

spread its green leaves

over the marshes born of Er-kishi's spit,

over the rotten, broken hills.

The tree's roots branched in earth;

the tree's branches rooted in sky;

through the tree peace passed,

peace between earth and sky;

in the tree earth and sky came together,

and in the tree was water's fullness.

Then God said:

"Let some birds fly,

a bird for every leaf on every branch;

and let every bird sing,

a song for every fruit of the tree;

let joy descend through the tree,

through the tree let loneliness end,

pain end in the songs of the birds."

Then birds came,

then birds sang,

but no birds came,

no birds sang on the north branch,

the songless, joyless

branch of the north.

The song completed joy,

finished the half-made.

As the birds sang,

moon and sun, sun and stars,

came to be;

day and night, earth and water,

all were full of song;

but something was lacking.

A delirious breeze, a drunken breeze,

blew over a lake,

over the first lake that ever was,

the breeze was a song

that had not been heard;

but something was lacking.

God was still lonely,

feeling the lack of something;

God thought

and found what was lacking;

found people were lacking:

"Let people grow,

a human grow from each of the nine roots."

Suddenly, the tree's roots swelled,

suddenly they burst through the earth;

a cry of sudden joy floated,

harmonious and joyful, among the hills;

the cry's sudden waves splashed,

splashed up to God,

there splashing the song of the nine new persons

who sang the joy of the gift of being.

Three men sang from the three eastern branches;

three women sang from the three western branches;

One man sang from the south,

and a man, thin and dry,

sang from the northern branch,

the thin dry branch of the north.

A woman sat,

a woman smiled

between the south and the north;

her smile hurried south,

her hands hurried north,

she was pulled north, drawn south:

at last she turned

& joined the man of the south.

An owl sat on the northern branch,

the single branch of the north,

and even today sits and whistles there;

and even today the north people

whistle and moan from primal sorrow.

Er-kishi's Envy

God Kara-han, having created people,

having completed creation,

called Er-kishi up from darkness, [2]

called him up to see the fullness of the light.

God Kara-han, full with fullness,

forgave Er-Kishi and called him back.

Er-kishi sped to God's call

but the sudden greenness swamped his eyes,

blinded his eyes with fullness of light;

the tree, the changing, shining tree

confused Er-kishi;

the people, changing and shining,

confused Er-kishi

with the luster of their new being:

What sort of thing was this,

what sort of thing?

Er-kishi ears were dumb with light,

he did not hear God Kara-han:

"How is it,

hey, Er-kishi,

how is it,

how do you like the world?"

At last Er-kishi's ears awoke,

he said:

"Who

who are they?

what

what is this?

what are these that sing?"

God Kara-han laughed:

"These?

These are my creatures,

all my beautiful creatures—

bird, tree, leaf,

wind, cloud, man—

all that Is is my world."

Then Er-kishi cringed and begged,

begged insanely:

"Give me

give me half,

give half, half, O God! Give so that your greatness

is shown in your giving.

After all,

I, I was your first friend,

your first companion."

God Kara-han replied

with a knife for a voice:

"No,

I cannot give you this world;

I cannot give you

what isn't mine."

"Not yours?

Not yours?

Did you not make it all?

Did you not,

just now,

say it was yours?

Lying is not godly!"

It seemed Er-kishi's slyness

slipped through the meshes

of God Kara-han's knowledge:

"Yes, we created, created all

you see and all you do not see.

We said Be and they were.

But what we created

we created not for ourself,

but for these, these people."

"Then give me,

give me half of the people."

Er-kishi's eyes and mouth

were a gang of robbers:

"Why I, I am the same as your baby brother,

so let us share."

God kara-han's smile was godly.

He knew Er-kishi's innerness,

knew with godly knowledge:

"Not born, never to die,

we have no brothers;

we said Be and all things were.

Out of our voice came all worlds.

Hey, Er-kishi,

you shall be given nothing,

none of the people will I give you;

but if you can get any,

if you can deceive any of the people,

They shall be yours,

they shall be your people

if they choose."

The power of God froze Er-kishi,

bound him moveless where he was

as God kara-han flew away,

as the people laughed and strolled beneath the tree.

Temptation

When day left, all slept—

wolf slept, bird slept,

even the northern owl slept—

while all were asleep

a song hummed from the tree's core,

a song of beauty from the world's core

lulled the people.

Only God Kara-han and double Er-kishi

remained awake;

while the people slept, [3]

God Kara-han created the dog

and created the snake

to keep the people from Er-kishi's evil.

The snake had legs and great beauty,

the dog was handsome and noble.

God set them to keep double Er-kishi

and his evil from the people.

Er-kishi, knowing nothing of the dog and snake,

thought it his his duty

to deceive, to steal the people,

to give them envy

that would turn them from God.

The song, the lullaby

from the tree's heartwood,

stopped and birds began to sing.

Daylight, cool with dreams,

entered the tree

and came from the tree to the people.

The people woke in the cool of dawn,

waking, saw the dog and the snake,

God's guardians over them.

"Praised be God," they said and ate,

eating only of the fruit of the east,

not eating or touching the rest of the fruit.

Er-kishi was filled with evil glee:

"Hey,

hey people,

people let me share your joy,

come to me."

Only the woman at the south

looked at Er-kishi,

looked and saw his handsomeness,

heard his warm words,

felt the killing light in his eyes.

The dog and the snake fenced out Er-kishi

with their contempt.

Er-kishi said:

"Hey,

hey people,

why do you eat those dried up fruits,

when those juicy ones

hang easy to pick

hey?

Let me know!"

The people answered:

"God forbade it."

"Try them once," said Er-kishi's soft voice,

"to obey and not know why you obey

is really stupid—maybe God is lying."

All the people, all but one,

answered: "God would not lie;

he who saves us, he who forgives us,

would not lie. Hey, stranger! You lie."

But the woman of the south,

who had not answered with the others,

whispered:

"Stranger,

are those fruits really sweet?

Stranger,

why would God forbid us them?

Tell me; I would know."

Er-kishi hid his evil-winged joy,

his joy in causing evil,

even in a woman,

and he spoke deceit,

spoke with conviction,

false conviction, deceitful passion:

"Hey

woman beautiful woman!

Your beauty is more than other women's—

so the sweetness of these fruits

surpasses the sweetness of other fruits.

Your God,

your jealous God,

forbid you to eat them

so he could have them

all to himself."

Er-kishi's words stirred the loose woman's heart;

he said:

"Reach out

reach out your hand,

let the beautiful earth

see these two beauties meet.

Reach."

The woman shivered a dream-shiver:

"Oh, no;

I am afraid;

God forbids."

The dog and the snake grew impatient,

the people's eyes were whetted with anger.

Again Er-kishi spoke:

"Forget,

forget the God

who forgot you long ago."

All but the woman,

all the people but the loose woman of the south,

shouted:

"Get out!

God does not forget.

You do not belong here.

Get out!"

The vengeful snake, the angry dog,

walked toward Er-kishi;

even as he backed away fearfully,

he added:

"Beautiful woman,

clever woman, I would know,

would know your name.

Can you tell me?"

"Ece," she answered, "I am Ece."

She pointed to the man beside her:

"He is Doganay;

we await you stranger—

what is your name?"

But Er-kishi could not answer;

the snake and the dog drove him north,

surely the north, miserable,

was the place of this evil one.

Double and Dark

But Er-kishi did not think himself miserable: [4]

chaos, chaos like the north, he knew;

what he feared, what made him miserable,

was order and truth, beauty and love.

The north did not shame him.

He waited for night,

for darkness to match his dark heart;

waiting, his evil heart

praised evil.

When evening came,

waters darkened;

over dark waters the owl screamed thinly,

dark clouds covered moon znd stars.

But every side of the tree flowed with light;

Er-kishi stared unblinking

at the streaming light of the people's tree;

he stared at the snake guarding forbidden fruit;

he stared at the dog sleeping at the tree's foot.

He stared at Ece, beautiful and captivating,

Ece speaking to Doganay:

"Doganay, bring me some of the forbidden fruits.

The stranger said they were sweet.

All the people sleep now,

so who will know if we eat?"

Doganay answered:

"God."

He sees us."

But the woman

was hungry, was thirsty;

hunger and thirst shook her bones;

her bones shook with her mouth's desire:

"Listen, Doganay, do you not love me?

You said you loved next after God;

did you lie?"

He sighed:

"It is not, is not,

is not a lie.

But do not ask this of me."

"Why?" asked womanly Ece,

"Why do you fear

one little fruit?

Are not my eyes worth

one little fruit?

What is your answer?"

Doganay's bones trembled,

his trembling spoke:

"You do not, Ece,

You do not know

what you are worth.

This fruit is not worth even your little finger;

but do not ask this of me!

Believe me,

the sweetness of your walk,

of each step toward me,

the joy of your closeness,

these are worth the world.

You have more brightness

than the sky;

but do not use your brightness

to make me sin;

do not make me sin

because of that ungodly liar.

Such sin would only bring us shame;

do not ask that fruit of me,

Ece, do not ask it."

He turned the eyes

of his opened hands to God:

"Forgive us, O God;

your law is ours."

Ece wept,

the forbidden fruit

burned within her.

Then came Er-kishi, double and dark,

soundlessly, coming near her.

In joy, great joy, she jumped:

"O! Stranger, O! Stranger."

Er-kishi's voice, like the fruit,

tickled and burned:

"Do you,

do you really,

really want

to eat of these fruits?"

All Ece's thirst, all her hunger,

all her dry desire, spoke:

"O! So much,

I want them so much,

you cannot know

how much."

"Then look, look there,

then reach, reach out,

they, they await you.

Come, reach out."

"But the snake, the snake guards,

he guards them so I cannot reach."

"Do not fear.

I will enter the snake."

And Er-kishi went up,

up like the night, up like smoke,

into the tree,

into the snake.

Ece looked where Doganay prayed;

in her looking, God was gone,

God seemed no longer to care.

Er-kishi, in the tree, in the snake,

bent the branch down to Ece,

the forbidden fruits shook with light,

were filled with light

that sang in the darkness:

"Come, come;

reach, reach."

God seemed not to know these things;

God Kara-han,

God who could see an ant's eyelashes,

thin and black, at midnight,

choose not to see Er-kishi

bending the shining fruit to Ece—

he had show his people good and evil,

left them to choose,

he would not lead them like children.

Doganay saw God

would not come, would not interfere;

he saw Ece plucking the fruit:

"Leave it!

Do not destroy this beauty

for a moment's joy,

Ece!

do not."

but she had eaten.

Eating the Fruit

Ece picked the large fruit [5]

and bit it quickly.

Its juice,

bitter yet sweet,

sweet yet unfulfilling,

burned through her mouth and throat,

burned a fire to her bones,

a fire of joy in daring to disobey.

Doganay's eyes widened in fear,

fear of lightning and chaos entangling the world;

Ece devoured the fruit

as Er-kishi devoured her with his eyes,

with his pride he consumed his first creature,

a woman.

Ece, trembling with desire,

trembling with the fruit's fire,

put half the flame in Doganay's mouth;

the first drop sparked

from his teeth to his tongue

and set his whole body afire,

his whole being burned

with one drop of that juice.

Half the fruit now remained—

Doganay gobbled at one edge,

Ece gobbled at the other—

half the last drop burnt Doganay's tongue,

the other half of the last drop burnt Ece's.

At this moment,

the sleepers woke,

a secret fear woke in the night,

a thousand confusions wandered in the dark.

Suddenly, they saw

their nakedness,

their naked souls,

and then they knew shame,

and the shame threw them apart.

Ece twisted in pain,

in a world of pain;

sweat drops big as hills

rolled from her skin,

loss swelled her eyes,

the whites of her eyes

ached and froze with fear

Doganay was also troubled;

his body was bent as he dug for water,

water to ease the woman's pain.

The grand water of creation was gone,

all that was left were roots and bugs.

Gok-ogul helped them,

helped them find tasty roots,

grass and shells and drinking water.

Also he taught them

to sow wheat and reap;

after sowing and reaping,

to grind and sweat, making bread.

Gok-ogul showed them how to make a wagon

to carry them from place to place.

Doganay and Ece took their children,

Took their children and went south.

The sickly man of the north root

went further north,

into the sickly, grey north

where the owl's cry whipped the cold

and the cold reared like a horse in battle.

Before God Ulgen sent the people away,

a man, a man under the east branches,

was Ay-atam and his women was Ay-va.

The other people took their children,

took their children and went west,

but Ay-atam and Ay-va went east,

took their two daughters to the east.

Now to the east, now to the west,

now to the south, now to the east,

now to all the four corners,

people walked bent with sorrow,

walked over the once-joyous earth,

spreading their sorrow with each step.

The Origins of the Turkish Peoples

"Pre-History."

God Leaves the Earth

Two Stood Apart ll

The Song of the Star

Turning to the Star

Altay Mountain

Bozkurt, Moon, and Tree

The Bozkurt's Flight

God Leaves the Earth

Earth had been created, [1]

sky had been created;

between earth and sky,

man had been created.

In man´s heart, many desires

had been created.

God Ulgen wanted men to live in harmony,

but they forgot God

and gave way to dark Erlik

whom God Ulgen threw into darkness.

God Ulgen went up to his sky-floors,

leaving men lonely;

went up and called his messengers up,

leaving man alone.

This leaving, God´s leaving,

whitened the sky and darkened the earth.

The peoples left alone,

felt pain from dawn to dusk, from dusk to dawn,

and had enough pain.

They looked to the blazing sky

and saw God´s wing

and there found shelter.

Two Stood Apart

But two people stood apart [2]

, two people thought.

Men had become evil,

forgetting God, serving Erlik.

Man and earth grew ugly together,

had no beauty, no happiness in them.

These two people, thinking apart,

thought "Better to leave them,

better to live in deserts and mountains,

live there and raise a people,

a people taught goodness and beauty."

These two people were Ay-Atam [3]

and Ay-Va, his wife,

his wife and two daughters;

the two daughters obeyed their mother,

and mother and daughters all obeyed Ay-Atom.

The Song of the Star

He said:

"There goes a road;

at its end is a place

where no bird sings,

where no waters flow,

where no chimney smokes;

there we shall go.

"

Ay-Atam stood beneath God Ulgen´s wing,

the great white wing stretched

in the skies of blue without end;

Ay-Atam stood and fixed his eyes on God´s wing.

His unshadowed eyes, spotless,

naked as the day he was created,

Ay-Atam´s eyes trembled;

then the wing shook light into his eyes.

Not understanding,

yet Ay-Va said: "I will go."

Thus the people to bring harmony was born;

had she not said "I will go,"

the unborn people would have withered in death.

Ay-Va and her daughters slept.

The moon-faced, day-breasted girls slept.

Ay-Atam´s eyes saw a star,

a burning star, a star of flowing water,

a star of summer nights,

a star that seemed to speak,

but Ay-Atam could not hear.

He shouted: "Speak, star!"

and woke Ay-Va who said:

"In my dream, I heard a song,

a song distant a hundred years—

`You are born again, star,

yellow star, hey! Blue star;

morning came, evening came,

day wandered, evening came,

the Pleiades pass not!

Seal ring on your finger,

gold bracelet on your arm,

why were you born yellow

star, blue star, star, hey!´"

A cosmos filled her;

she could speak no more.

Turning to the Star

The girls woke screaming "The star!"

They leaned together and saw stars,

stars moving within moving stars;

the star that spoke flowed in a bright line

, flowed and split as the other stars split also;

half the brightest star went north, turned west,

the two halves stopping at the western sea,

stopping in silence, then becoming one star,

one five-pointed, gleaming star.

The crescent moon cupped that star,

star and moon shining red,

a red light embracing land and sea

as moon and star turn gleaming white.

Ay-Va, Ay-Atam and their daughters

turned to the southwest,

turned to star and moon,

turned and left the evil behind

, turned and went toward dazzling red and white.

They passed through mountains

bright with dawn,

they slept in fields under star and crescent,

days they passed through desert

, leaving evil behind.

Altay Mountain

Finally they reached a mountain, [4]

A mountain below a half moon.

Ay-Atam said:

"This mountain below the moon

is a moon, set on earth,

reaching to sky.

The girls shouted

the mountain´s name:

"Altay! Altay!"

Mountain echoes came: "Altay," a voice spreading to moon,

to earth, to sky,

a deep, a humming voice:

"Altay!"

Night came from the mountain,

with night, came a voice from the mountain,

after the voice, came a man:

"Who are you? Who are you?"

From a cave in the mountain came a man,

came a friend, not a stranger—

Doganay.

Açe, too, was in the cave,

old and wrinkled,

old and dried from her sin, the first sin.

Hers sons and daughters filled the cave.

Ay-Atom said:

"Doganay,

after we were expelled from our home,

when we wandered, where did you go?"

Açe, hearing this, hid in a corner;

Doganay said:

"She, she is heavy,

heavy with shame,

thinking that through her

all men are wronged.

But if she had not,

someone—even I—

if she had not eaten the fruit,

someone would have.

Though he forbade us,

God really meant

that we should eat the fruit.

"In guilt, we left the other people,

and, suffering, came here."

Doganay and Açe

made a place for Ay-Atam and his family.

Bozkurt, Moon, and Tree

Ay-Atam dreamed,

dreamed of Altay,

dreamed of the mountain beneath the moon,

the mountain that was itself a moon—

Altay stood, dark against dark night;

at the highest peak, a Bozkurt howled, [5]

a Bozkurt within a wide blue light

shouted strange, unheard sounds.

From the feet of Altay,

a moon climbed, climbed from Ay-Atam´s

swelling chest; tumbled and turned

and climbed to the Bozkurt;

the moon brightened

before the Bozkurt;

white lights covered all things

that Ay-Atam saw.

Then the lights went,

then the wide blue light went out,

then the Bozkurt was silent.

The moon´s light flowed

to Altay´s ridges,

to an oak sapling

that greened and spread,

spread and became a huge tree,

huge as Altay,

fertile with moon beams,

blessed as was the first tree.

Ay-Atam rose,

feeling the moon, feeling the tree,

within his chest,

no longer a tree but a vast people:

Ay-Atam sang to the tree:

"Tree standing

in the light of God Ulgen´s eyes,

tree that is the door

to God Ulgen´s house,

tree that spreads

to bridge the waters,

ship of darkness and darkened seas,

of fearless men, fearless women;

you were needed in our land."

The tree answered:

"I am in your land,

in your land;

I am in you, in you—

I am you,

am you, you."

Ay-Atam woke,

still dreaming his dream,

awake in his dream before Altay.

Doganay had put his back to the cave,

had turned to the sun,

had turned and now dawn spread from his body,

spread from his body to fill the cave.

Doganay turned to Ay-Atom:

"I know your dream,

I also dreamed and know

the tree is you,

the tree´s branches

are your generations.

"

Ay-Atom said:

"So I saw it,

but was embarrassed;

what shall I do?"

Doganay answered:

"I thought first your daughters

should mate with my sons

but I know now they must marry, marry a deathless one.

Leave the godly maidens alone."

That evening they built a tower,

a tower of branches on Altay´s peak,

and shut the girls there,

shut the daughters alone on the peak

.

The girls waited.

The Bozkurt´s Flight

From night within night, Bozkurt came,

his eyes like dawn,

his look like the hope of dawn,

his feathers and hair aflame

with the dawn in his eyes.

Around the tower,

around its four sides he went,

then he stopped—

his eyes´ light now was blood,

that melted like iron

and flew to the tower´s top,

flew in two drops of light,

a drop clinging to each girl,

drops of light from Bozkurt´s eyes

making each girl a star.

Bozkurt sped to the steepest,

to the highest rock of the peak;

the moon-the fearless, godly moon-rose

, the moon´s light twined with the wolf´s light.

The moon at Altay´s peak, the wolf at the peak,

both became one before the girls.

Bozkurt called the moon,

called with love, called with strength,

his call frightened silence;

the gaps were being filled—

filled with wolf-light, with moon-light,

filled with the song of the Bozkurt.

Nine nights long Bozkurt howled;

nine nights long-girls, stars, Altay-

all things seen, all things unseen,

heard his song.

The ninth night ended,

the time had come-trembling together

the girls left the tower;

trembling together,

they mounted Bozkurt;

earth trembled, sky trembled;

Bozkurt trembled.

The trembling ceased;

before Bozkurt was a void, a deep gap.

Toward it he flew.

No man could grasp this awesome flight,

but the girls now were more than human—

now they were Bozkurt and gap and sky and Altay—

now they were holy,

these daughters of Ay-Atom.

The girls gripped Bozkurt´s mane,

gripped with joyful madness

as they flew through the dark gaps

between sky and Altay;

together with Bozkurt they shivered in ecstasy—

with a last godly howl he filled the world,

filled the world with joy,

filled it to fullness and beyond.

Bozkurt and the girls hung in the sky,

Bozkurt and the girls became one;

their howl was the first voice

of the people of harmony—

all day, between gaps and sky and Altay,

they stayed, flaring with pleasure,

sizzling with daylight.

Bozkurt and the girls became a ball,

a ball of blue light—

no more were they Bozkurt and girls;

they became the ball of blue light

floating and riding the soft breeze;

the light consumed Bozkurt and the girls

with its soft and silent speed.

The ball of light dazzled,

it turned, it sped—

it became whiter than fresh milk;

then it flowed west,

west toward Hulin mountain;

flaming, it burned the night clouds;

flaming, it climbed night clouds and sky

made the clouds a stair to climb Mount Hulin.