

# STEPPELAND DREAMING INITIATIVE

encouraging indigenous forms of liturgy and worship among the Tuvan people of Central Asia



a collaborative effort of Jesus People USA, Hope in Transit, & Heart Sounds International (OM Arts)

**Tuva:** The geographical center of Asia. A southern Siberian Russian republic just northwest of Mongolia. A land where towering mountains cradle river valleys which flow into the rolling steppes. Home to a hardy indigenous people with a rich cultural heritage. A people who have only heard the story of Jesus with the last few decades.

**The Steppeland Dreaming Initiative** exists to encourage and empower culturally appropriate forms of worship and liturgy among these new indigenous followers of the way of Jesus. We Grovers (Brian, Leah, Meghan, Amelia & Graeme) are uniquely positioned for this outreach in large part due to Brian's proficiency in the traditional Tuvan polyphonic vocal techniques and our passion and respect for Tuvan culture.

But why is this important, why can't the indigenous people receive the gospel in the same forms as the Caucasian people? Why is there even a need for culturally appropriate (or contextualized) forms of worship, liturgy, and evangelization? The Apostle Paul makes a case for contextualization in 1 Corinthians 9:18-23, he just called it "becoming all things to all men". Paul understood that the gospel must look normal and natural to a people within a culture if it is to be authentically understood. What looks foreign is generally rejected by the majority within a culture, and when foreign forms and practices are forced on people, they have very little meaning since folks are usually just "going through the motions". When the gospel is communicated through culturally appropriate forms, then scriptural truths can be meaningfully understood and the Spirit can lead in the growth of the church.

In Russia the indigenous cultures of Siberia are generally thought to be inferior by the Caucasian culture; unfortunately this bias is often present in the Caucasian churches. If you wonder whether developmental or social differences between cultures may make some cultures better suited for the gospel; consider this spiritual color-wheel diagram.



In it 3 spheres of culture are considered; God's ideal, my culture, and indigenous (their) culture. Areas where the circles overlap are shared cultural norms. In the past much missionary work has been done under the assumption that the missionary culture was Godly while the indigenous culture was not. So, interactions tended to focus on cultural differences. It is important to note that my culture does not completely conform to God's ideal nor is the indigenous culture completely devoid of God's ideal. It is usually far more effective to take the time to learn how God has been present in the indigenous culture and start where both cultures overlap with God's ideal (white area) and then strive to build on that towards God's ideal.

Especially significant is the area outside my cultural norms where the indigenous culture overlaps with God's ideal. The indigenous people instinctively understand aspects of God's character that are difficult for me to conceive! We must proceed with great humility and much quiet listening and observation in order to determine the areas of overlap; then join them in the faith journey, moving together towards God's purposes and ideals.

For the near future we will only be able to do short term visits to Tuva (about a month or so at a time), so we will focus on coming along side existing efforts and enhancing them as we may. The main focus, however, will be encouraging the development of contextualized worship; there are not many Caucasian Christians that can praise God with music using authentic traditional Tuvan style throat singing, so that puts us in a very unique position. Utilizing the traditional music is no small thing since Tuvan culture has been looked down on by the Caucasian culture. Some in the Caucasian churches were actually teaching that Tuvan culture is inherently demonic. So it is especially impactful when brian identifies himself with the Tuvan culture and, as a Caucasian Christian, utilizes the traditional singing forms in praise to God. Additionally, our awareness and use of the traditional forms helps in building a rapport with indigenous people that would typically take much longer.

We would also like to introduce the indigenous Christians to the Tuvan traditional musicians we've met over the years. This will supply the indigenous churches with professional level music instruction as well as forging relationships for "peer ministry". Along with that we also hope to provide equipment and training in audio recording so that the indigenous Christians will be able to record and distribute the new songs they are writing.

In our decades of living in intentional community amongst the poor in Chicago as well as our time spent on the Navajo lands, we have found that a healthy family making mistakes, working through struggles, communicating and reconciling can be a powerful display of God's presence and work. Also, children are usually really good at "breaking the ice" to kick start interactions. So we hope to do these trips with our whole family whenever possible.



The two big obstacles we have before us are language acquisition and financial support. Though we can get around language barriers with translators, it is more effective with contextualization efforts to be able to speak the local language. This is complicated in Tuva due to the fact that the official language is Russian (Tuva is currently a part of the Russian Federation), but the indigenous Tuvans usually prefer to use their native language, especially outside of the urban centers. To make each full trip a reality will cost \$40,000. Since we already live in a full time communal ministry in Chicago, we don't have the means to earn and save this amount of money on our own, so these finances will need to be raised in other ways. Please especially pray for guidance and provision as we surmount these obstacles.

Thank you for your interest in the Steppeland Dreaming Initiative and following our journey in discovering how God has made himself present among the Tuvan people and encouraging people in the Jesus way through indigenous music and culture.

If you would like additional information or are interested in supporting or partnering with us please check out our web site

<http://www.USkhoomeizhi.org/Initiative/>

email us [xoomeizhi@gmail.com](mailto:xoomeizhi@gmail.com)

or call 417-763-0423

By God's great grace and mercy,

brian, Leah, Meghan, Amelia, & Graeme Grover

