



LITANY OF THE WORRY BIRD

The *Litany of the Worry Bird* is one of the most compact examples of Udu religious oral tradition. Consistent with other prayers, the majority of the litany is from the first-person perspective of the speaker, who is both metaphorically addressing a deity (the World Creature, in this case taking on the form colloquially known as the Worry Bird) and literally coexisting with the deity (the neighbor). This duality is core to Udu spirituality, and enables deity characters to be both subjects and objects.

This story is meant to be heard, read aloud, read together; anyone can begin, and anyone can choose to participate in any of the stanzas. Many regional variations have been recorded.



This call-and-response storytelling style is common on Udur in the Dzid mountain range region. Dzid-Udur is known for its nearly-uninhabitable climate, and the necessity of its inhabitants to continuously move across regions to avoid snow-storms. As a result, the long periods of either movement or darkness, spent in large groups, are filled by turn-based collective storytelling. The longest tales can take days, with different parts of the group choosing how and when to participate.

CALL	RESPONSE
Oak tried to contain the voice;	But you cannot always contain such a [strange] voice.
After much effort, it got out of Oak's throat,	And it [slipped along the slopes].
Could the pack find it?	No, the pack were too few and too weary.
What did the pack do?	They all started to howl.
Who heard their howl?	All the neighboring packs.
Could the neighboring packs find it?	No, they were still too few and too weary.
What did the neighboring packs do?	They started to howl, too.
Who heard their multiplied howl?	All the creatures of the [snowy mantle].



We are waking.

We are awake.

My hand is like the World Hand.

The World Hand is a powerful claw.

My shoulder is like the World Shoulder.

The World Shoulder extends into a splendid wing.

My mouth is like the World Mouth.

The World Mouth is a hard toothy beak.

I am like the World Creature

and the World Creature is my neighbor.

My neighbor despairs:

I hear claws scraping.

I ask my neighbor: Why do you cry?

My neighbor tells me, wings asunder:

Would you not cry for [the drying river /
the hollow tree / the last of a species]?

Would you not cry for [a lover's leaving /
a parent's scorn / a child's empty belly]?

I despair with my neighbor:

Our claws tear open our house.

I feel my anger rise, I feel my anger drive me.

I will help my neighbor, I will mend the ill,
I will prevent despair.

To the hollow tree I bring nourishment, and fill it;

It grows and the World Creature smiles.

To the drying river I reroute a well;

It flows and the World Creature smiles.

To my lover I entreat and explain;

They return and the World Creature smiles.

But the tree needs more nourishment than I can provide

And my neighbors using the well need its water.

The lover remembers themselves;

The World Creature, despondent, weeps.

I beg the World Creature forgiveness

And I ask what I could do to make it better.

And the World Creature, my neighbor,

Tells me to watch its tears: where they fall, life flourishes.

Understanding this, we may sleep;

We rest.

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