

The Real Chöd Practice

The Tibetan word “chöd” means “to cut off” or “to slay.” The traditional practice of Chöd cuts off self-cherishing and grasping at a truly existent “I.” It creates the conditions under which one can develop the mind of conventional bodhichitta, which holds others as more dear than oneself, and the mind of ultimate bodhichitta, which sees reality as it truly is. Attributed to the great Tibetan yogini Machig Labdron, and the only practice that made its way back to India from Tibet, it is an extremely effective and quick tantric method for attaining realizations of the path to enlightenment.

In this teaching, Lama Zopa Rinpoche explains the essence of Chöd, the “real Chöd” that everyone can practice in everyday life.

When somebody tells you something that really hurts your mind, that is the most beneficial thing for your mind because it goes straight in your heart and touches your ego.

This is what shows you, like a mirror, like a teaching from the Buddha, one’s own mistaken thoughts, especially the ego; it shows that there is ego, and because there is ego, it hurts.

If there is no ego, then it would never hurt. When people say what your mistakes are, or say words which hurt you, that is the real Chöd practice. This is what makes you see your “I,” the emotional “I” – in Western psychological terms – the object of ignorance, the root of samsara, which is holding this “I” as truly existent.

Normally one is not aware of this, but by doing the practice of Chöd, inviting the spirits, they create violence and it makes you see the “I,” the object of ignorance, the object to be refuted – the truly existent “I” – clearly. They show the “I” to you very clearly and then you are able to recognize that it is false, an object of ignorance; you are able to use your reasoning, logical reasoning, that the “I” doesn’t exist because it is a dependant arising, or merely imputed. It is merely imputed relating to the aggregates, the base, etc. There are so many other reasonings you can use. You recognize the object to be refuted *at that minute*. That it is what doesn’t exist at all; it is totally non-existent.

This is similar to Chöd. When you are in an environment with the conditions of people who use harsh words, or who bring up your mistakes, this is so helpful.

[This is also true] in Iraq and those places where there are many killings and enemies. There are two sides attacking each other and the Americans are supporting one side. The other side is the enemy to the USA, so they are killing this outside enemy. But you see, here, our practice is killing the inner enemy. Those “outside enemies” are sentient beings, the most precious, most kind sentient beings, from whom one receives all past, present, and future happiness, liberation and enlightenment, everything: they are the most precious, most kind ones.

What we should practice is killing the inner enemy, the delusions, and the only way to do that is with dharma practice: to achieve liberation, to achieve ultimate happiness, everlasting happiness, cessation of all the sufferings and no more rebirth, old age, sickness and death, all the sufferings of each of the six realms.

So [we do this] not only to achieve liberation for oneself, but also to achieve enlightenment, great liberation, for the benefit of all sentient beings.

In the world, they are killing so many sentient beings, who are the most kind, most precious ones, the source of one’s own past, present, and future happiness, thinking the enemy is outside and killing them.

What we need to practice is killing the inner enemy – the delusions. We need to make war with the delusions and defeat them. ☸

Transcribed by Ven. Yangchen. Lightly edited by Ven. Holly Ansett and Mandala staff.



MACHIG LABDRON

Machig Labdron is among the best loved of Tibetan saints, along with her contemporary, Milarepa, and the eighth-century female saint, Yeshe Tsogyal. Born in the late eleventh-century with all the signs that accompany the birth of a great being, Machig Labdron (Machig: "one mother" and Labdron: "light of Labchi") was a brilliant child prodigy. By her mid-teens, she could recite the entire 100,000 verse Prajnaparamita in a single day and could comprehensively explain its meaning as well. However, she had not yet internalized that meaning. She meditated following the instructions of her teacher, and one day while reciting the chapter on evil spirits, attained complete realization.

In her adulthood, Machig Labdron became a great teacher and tantric yogini who founded the system of Mahamudra Chöd, which transforms negative mind states and frightening forces into great love and compassion, and cuts away the self-grasping, self-cherishing "I." She was the physical mother of three children, all of whom became great adepts and played a significant role in transmitting their mother's practice lineage down to the present day.

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