

## TIBETAN CHÖD

2018-19 USA Tour and Presentation by Monks of the Labrang Tashi Kyil Monastery in Dehra Dun, India



A Tibetan word meaning to “sever or cut off,” Chöd is a spiritual practice found primarily in Tibetan Buddhism and is known as “Cutting Through the Ego.” The founder of Chöd is a great Tibetan Yogini, Machig Labdrön. She is often depicted with the attributes of a dakini, a representation of enlightened female energy.

Machig Labdrön taught that “you may think that gods are the ones who give you benefits, and demons cause damage; but it may be the other way around. Those who cause you pain teach you to be patient. Those who give presents to you may keep you from practicing the Dharma. Whether they are gods or demons depends on their effect on you.”



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Chöd is regarded as challenging and potentially dangerous for some practitioners. Using rituals, sometimes set in graveyards, and visualizing the offering of bodily flesh in a tantric feast, the Chöd practitioners seek to tap the power of fear and create a sense of victory. These activities test whether there is a clear understanding of “emptiness,” the lack of true identity of all phenomena and the truth of impermanence.

In Tibet, a meditator would go into a graveyard – a place of death that symbolized the death of the ego. The practitioner would symbolically offer the flesh of his/her body as a feast to hungry ghosts whose attachments to desirous objects in their lives now lead them to dwell in a state of perpetual hunger.

Today, a meditator can visualize “cutting away” any of those practices that prevent him from being a truly happy person. As a result, a meditator’s lack of ego can assist others in his life to also be truly happy. For example, visualize a day or a week without such activities as TV, playing video games, or trying to “get your way.” Not that these are always bad in themselves, but they can sometimes result in a feeling of perpetually dissatisfaction and being less responsive to the needs of others.

Symbolically, the skin of the practitioner's body may represent surface reality. In the visualization, it is cut from bones that represent the true reality of existence.



When meditating, monks or nuns will wear a veil over his/her face. This symbolizes that entering a state of “emptiness,” the ultimate reality. A horn is blown, which resembles a thigh bone, an offering to the hungry ghosts.

Also in Chöd meditation, a practitioner may visualize imaginary fearful or painful situations encountered in life. Facing them will help to cut through attachment to the self. The meditator visualizes concretely those fears that cause him to be inauthentic, “fake” -- avoiding dealing honestly with life’s situations. The visualizations may be embodied in a symbolic character such as Gollum and “My Precious.”