From Chod to Feeding Your Demons: A Western Approach to Tibetan Tantra

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What is Chod?
Chod is a complex seven step Tibetan tantric Buddhist meditation practice. Its main purpose is to help practitioners attain enlightenment by “severing” the root causes of human suffering.
Tibetan transliteration: gCod; pronounced: chö

• To sever or cut
Pa Dampa Sangye

- Pacification of Suffering lineage
- Machik Lapdrön
- Codified and transmitted Chod in Tibet

11th Century C.E.

Machik Lapdrön

- Buddhist Prodigy
- Perfection of Wisdom Sutras
- Created, codified and transmitted Chod in Tibet
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Machik Lapdrön

Buddhist Prodigy

Perfection of Wisdom Sutras

Created, codified and transmitted Chod in Tibet
Regardless, Machik occupies the role of primary disseminator, codifier, and symbolic representation of the source of Chod’s contemporary and ancient use.
Tara Mandala
• Founder and Director of Tara Mandala
• Former Tibetan monastic
• Officially recognized as an emanation of Machik Lapdron.
An attempt to "find a way to make [Machik's] approach accessible in a Western context."
My Approach:

- To what extent is Feeding Your Demons a rendition of Machik's Chod practice?
- What insights does FYD give us about the nature of Buddhism as practiced in the West?
"One of the most comprehensive written texts extant within the Chöd tradition attributed to Machik"

FYD's only descriptive and liturgical guide, written by Lama Tsultrim Allione
- Alterations in Rituals
- Institutional Restrictions
- Meditative Philosophy
Rituals: Deity Yoga

• a practice in which one visualizes themselves in an enlightened form, which is thought to transfer buddha-qualities to the practitioner and expedite the enlightenment process.
FYD

1. Find the Demon
2. Personify the Demon and Ask What it Needs
3. Become the Demon
4. Feed the Demon and Meet the Ally
• Western approaches for suffering remediation only address the superficial problem.
• Identifying an illness’ underlying need and feeding it can release the energy the disease is harboring.
Institutional Restrictions

- Tantric Buddhism, in general is considered esoteric.
- The rituals are only available to experienced practitioners with explicit permission from an authorized teacher.
Lama Tsultrim Allione

"Feeding Your Demon ... doesn't require any knowledge of Buddhism or of any other Tibetan spiritual practice."
Meditative Philosophy

FYD: a way to access the subconscious by observing mental imagery
  - observe whatever arises from your subconscious
Chod: an intentional conjuring of visualizations
  - intricate details with regard to the proper visualizations that will assist the practitioner on their path to enlightenment
Conclusion

• FYD reflects a radically different practice than traditional Chod.

• Transformations of the soteriological dimension indicate that Allione has innovated a pragmatic Western version of Chod with a telos more concerned with psychological and physiological well-being than buddhahood.
Buddhism in the West

Pragmatism vs Transcendence
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