

Introduction to the Lama Chöpa Tsoh



Jewel Heart welcomes everyone who wishes to celebrate the Lama Chöpa Tsoh, a practice which can be of great benefit for beginners as well as advanced practitioners. The following information is meant to be useful for those who are thinking about attending this beautiful and inspiring group practice.

All are invited to participate, including children, who can sit with their parents and get up and move around if they need to. Children often enjoy helping to distribute the food offerings. If the entire practice is too long for them, they can come in at the time of the actual offering and enjoy the singing. The Lama Chöpa with Tsoh offering generally takes about an hour.

What is a Tsoh offering?

The Tibetan word Tsoh means gathering, collection, or assembly. The Tsoh offering is a great feast offered to all enlightened beings and to all non-enlightened beings as well, including ourselves. It is one of the most important practices of generosity, and is also extremely effective for accumulation of merit.

The food offered is always of the best possible quality and quantity. After the Tsoh is completed, the food offerings are

shared among the participants and may either be eaten at that time or taken home to share with family.

A Tsoh always includes offerings of bala (meat or fish) and mandana (alcohol). A small amount of these substances will be distributed to all participants after they have been offered to the enlightened beings. If you are a strict vegetarian, you may just touch the bala with your ring finger and don't really have to eat any, and those who don't want to take alcohol can do the same. Since a Tsoh is a joyful uplifting offering to enlightened beings, during the practice you should refrain from gossip, whispering, joking, or doing anything you would hesitate to do in the presence of an actual Buddha.

A Tsoh can be done in various ways. In Jewel Heart we commonly make this offering within the practice of the Lama Chöpa, the Offering to the Spiritual Guide.

What is the Lama Chöpa?

The Lama Chöpa is a guru yoga of Je Tsongkhapa, the great scholar and yogi who founded the Gelug tradition within Tibetan Buddhism. Based in secret oral teachings, the Lama Chöpa was first written down in Tibetan verse by Panchen Lozang Chögyen around 1600. In Tibet, many people, even children, knew this practice by heart, and it continues to be a daily practice in the Gelugpa monasteries throughout the world.

This comprehensive practice strengthens our relationship with our spiritual teachers through offerings, especially offerings of our practice. It guides us through a meditation that includes all the necessary prerequisites: after beginning with Mahayana

refuge and bodhimind, we generate our visualization of the merit field and invite the actual enlightened beings, to whom we then offer the Seven Limb practice in elaborate and beautiful verses. Also included is a detailed meditation on all the stages of the path to enlightenment.

Gehlek Rimpoche, in his transcript *Guru Devotion: How to Integrate the Primordial Enlightened Mind*, describes the importance of the Lama Chöpa:

“This practice includes the development of bodhimind, both absolute and relative, and at the end it picks up the essence of Vajrayana practice, development and completion stage, along with combined sutra and tantra Mahamudra. That is its real essence. It is very fortunate that we can do such a practice...”

It can be done in a very simple and easy way, by just reading and understanding the words, and it can be done in a very profound way. When you do it the profound way, almost the whole essence of both sutra and tantra is brought in. It is such an interesting practice; if you are not that intelligent or diligent you can do it in the simple, easy way of just reading, and when you go a little bit deeper in it, its depth is tremendous! You can go one step down, or ten feet down, or three thousand feet down. If you do it superficially, it will give you good benefit, and, if you do it in depth, it will give you tremendous benefit!”

At Jewel Heart, most of the Lama Chöpa is recited in English, using a translation supervised by Gehlek Rimpoche, so that participants can understand the meaning of what they are saying. A few sections in the Lama Chöpa and the Tsoh are sung in the original Tibetan (our prayer book has the Tibetan written in

English letters), using traditional melodies, at times accompanied by bell and damaru (small hand drum). In the great monasteries of Tibet, now reestablished in India, a Lama Chöpa Tsoh would be accompanied as well by cymbals, drums, great trumpets and oboe-like reed instruments.

What to bring to a Lama Chöpa Tsoh

If you have a blue Jewel Heart prayer book, bring it; otherwise you can borrow one of the center’s copies. To participate fully, bring either an offering of good quality food such as bread, cookies, cake or fruit, or an offering of money, which will help to pay for the food which the center has purchased for the Tsoh.

Practitioners can sit either on cushions or chairs. If you are new to this practice, you will probably want to concentrate on the words, rather than trying to use a bell, vajra or damaru drum, but if you have these ritual implements you may bring them. The prayer books and implements should not be placed directly on the floor, so bring a cloth to put under them.



If you have further questions about this practice, any of the Jewel Heart instructors or facilitators will be happy to talk with you and try to answer them, or you may contact Hartmut Sagolla:
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