

How to Feed Your Demons by Lama Tsultrim Allione

Feeding our demons rather than fighting them contradicts the conventional approach of fighting against whatever assails us. But it turns out to be a remarkably effective path to inner integration.

Demons (maras in Sanskrit) are not bloodthirsty ghouls waiting for us in dark corners. Demons are within us. They are energies we experience every day, such as fear, illness, depression, anxiety, trauma, relationship difficulties, and addiction.

Anything that drains our energy and blocks us from being completely awake is a demon. The approach of giving form to these inner forces and feeding them, rather than struggling against them, was originally articulated by an eleventh-century female Tibetan Buddhist teacher named Machig Labdrön (1055–1145). The spiritual practice she developed was called Chöd, and it generated such amazing results that it became very popular, spreading widely throughout Tibet and beyond.

In today's world, we suffer from record levels of inner and outer struggle. We find ourselves ever more polarized, inwardly and outwardly. We need a new paradigm, a fresh approach to conflict. Machig's strategy of nurturing rather than battling our inner and outer enemies offers a revolutionary path to resolve conflict and leads to psychological integration and inner peace.

The method that I have developed, called Feeding Your Demons, is based on the principles of Chöd adapted for the Western world. Here is an abbreviated version of the practice, in five steps.

Step 1: Find the Demon in Your Body

After generating a heartfelt motivation to practice for the benefit of yourself and all beings, decide which demon you want to work with. Choose something that feels like it is draining your energy right now. If it's a relationship issue, work with the feeling that is arising in you in the relationship as the demon, rather than the other person.

Thinking about the demon you have chosen to work with, perhaps remembering a particular incident when it came up strongly, scan your body and ask yourself: Where is the demon held in my body most strongly? What is its shape? What is its color? What is its texture? What is its temperature?

Now intensify this sensation.

Step 2: Personify the Demon

Allow this sensation, with its color, texture, and temperature, to move out of your body and become personified in front of you as a being with limbs, a face, eyes, and so on.

Notice the following about the demon: size, color, surface of its body, density, gender, if it has one, its character, its emotional state, the look in its eyes, something about the demon you did not see before.

Now ask the demon the following questions: What do you want? What do you really need? How will you feel when you get what you really need?

Step 3: Become the Demon

Switch places, keeping your eyes closed as much as possible. Take a moment to settle into the demon's body. Feel what it's like to be the demon. Notice how your normal self looks from the demon's point of view. Answer these questions, speaking as the demon: What I want is.... What I really need is.... When I get what I really need, I will feel... (Take particular note of this answer.)

Step 4: Feed the Demon and Meet the Ally

Take a moment to settle back into your own body. See the demon opposite you. Then dissolve your own body into nectar. The nectar has the quality of the feeling that the demon would have when it gets what it really needs (i.e. the answer to the third question). Notice the color of the nectar.

Imagine this nectar is moving toward the demon and nurturing it. Notice how the demon takes it in. You have an infinite supply of nectar. Feed the demon to its complete satisfaction and notice how it transforms in the process. This can take some time.

Notice if there is a being present after the demon is completely satisfied. If there is a being present, ask it: "Are you the ally?" If it is, you will work with that being. If it is not, or if there is no being present after feeding the demon to complete satisfaction, invite the ally to appear.

When you see the ally, notice all the details of the ally: size, color, surface of its body, density, gender (if it has one), its character, its emotional state, the look in its eyes, something about the ally you did not see before.

When you really feel connected with the energy of the ally, ask these questions: How will you help me? How will you protect me? What pledge do you make to me? How can I access you?

Change places and become the ally. Take a moment to settle into the ally's body and notice how it feels to be in the ally's body. How does your normal self look from the ally's point of view? When you are ready, answer these questions, speaking as the ally: I will help you by... I will protect you by... I pledge I will... You can access me by...

Take a moment to settle back into your own body and see the ally in front of you. Look into its eyes and feel its energy pouring into your body.

Now imagine that the ally dissolves into light. Notice the color of this light. Feel it dissolving into you and integrate this luminosity into every cell of your body. Take note of the feeling of the integrated energy of the ally in your body. Now you, with the integrated energy of the ally, also dissolve.

Step 5: Rest in Awareness

Rest in whatever state is present after the dissolution. Pause until discursive thoughts begin again, then gradually come back to your body. As you open your eyes, maintain the feeling of the energy of the ally in your body.