

The Secret Biography of Machig Labdron

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I have translated it with the help of Chhimed Rigdzin from an anonymous text that he collected in the course of his travels.

Homage to the holy Gurus.

In former times Machig Labdron was the Indian Dakini known as Gauri.¹ Later, the Dakini came to Tibet in order to benefit sentient beings. She took birth in the district of Labs in Central Tibet. Her father was Khyega Cholha and her mother was Lumo Bumcham. Her own name was Labdron. Her brother was called Khyega Khore. Their village which was known as *Tsher* was on the east side below the ridge where the constellation of Kartik² arose.

Offers of marriage came from all directions yet she was kept in the family. But there was a rich man known as Kunga among the herders of the north and he gave Machig's parents much wealth and asked to marry her. When her parents saw the riches, they gave Machig to the herder.

She went to the house of the herder and there the thought came to her that in order to get just one meal to eat or one piece of cloth to wear in the villages of these nomads it was necessary to do some sinful action [such as killing animals, stealing their wool and milk etc.] With these thoughts, she dropped a hot clay pot, as if her hand were unsteady. Then her husband's father and mother asked: "*Girl, is there something wrong with your health?*"

Machig replied "*Yes, my health is not good and my condition may get worse.*"

Her in-laws said that she should receive initiation and do religious practice as this would be beneficial. But then they would not permit her to go.³ She was forbidden to go beyond the lower area of the village. One day she threw fire on her hands and feet so that blisters developed. Her husband's parents said: "*You are troubled by the Land Owner Spirits.*"

Machig said, "*Yes, I have that trouble and they are sure to cause more disturbance.*"

The parents-in-law said that she would be helped by reciting Vajrapani's mantra but still they would not allow her to go for instruction. Machig thought; "*The only thing that is*

¹ Sometimes this is held to mean Shiva's wife but here the reference is to Pundarika, the wife of Vajrasattva

² The Pleiades, *sKar.Ma. sMin.drug*

³ Although her parents said this, they would not allow her to leave.

beneficial for me is the holy dharma." And so one morning she hung her milking pot from her waist and put a small golden knife inside her amulet case.

Going to the cattle, she squatted as if to milk the cows. She placed the milking pail below the cow as a chopping block and then she cut off both her thumbs with the knife. At this all the herders cried: *"What have you done! For all our activities, whether weaving wool, milking cattle or whatever we do, thumbs are most essential Now you must go to your village!"*.

So Machig went back to her home and when her parents asked her why she had returned she replied; *"My thumbs became diseased and infected and so I lost them. Then the herders told me to go so I came here. Now I am a useless woman so please allow me to go to the dharma."*

Her parents only commented; *"The loss of your thumbs is not so bad There are many here who like you, so we will send you to whichever of your neighbours you find pleasing."*

Machig told them: *"I have been born in the happy continent of Jambuling. My five sense organs are complete. At this time when I have obtained a precious human existence,⁴ the Dharma alone is of benefit to me. Moreover, this illusory body composed of the five elements is like a rainbow in the sky. The small wind of the demon lord of death will develop within it causing sickness and pain, and then my four limbs will become paralysed. Then my breath will become as fine as a cobweb, barely escaping from my nose. I will desire food yet will only be able to drink water. At that time only the dharma will help me. I do not like the false worldly way of lay people. Now even if the sun were to rise from the west or if someone were to cut my throat, I would not become a housewife."* Having spoken thus she sang this song to her father:

"I take refuge in the father Gurus.

I pray to these most kind ones.

Please hold all the beings in the six realms with your compassion

and especially please bless me a beggar,

that I may enter the Dharma.

"At first I, this girl, believed in my fatherland. ⁵

As practice I worked with both earth and stone

⁴ A precious human existence is one which has the optimum personal and environmental qualities to support dharma practice.

⁵ Pha.Yul, native place of ones family or ancestors.

and as a result a large house arose.

Yet on the day that I die I must leave that house.

In the end this fatherland is also empty and unreliable.

I will not stay here

but I will go to the Dharma.

As for these duties of the fatherland,

father, you must perform them yourself!"

Her father made no reply. Then again her mother approached and said, "Daughter, you tell your father that you want to practise dharma and say that you will not do any of the activities of this life. Well, those people who practice the dharma also change their ideas and then return home. Therefore you must go to the husband your parents send you to!"

To this Machig replied; "Mother, you must listen well to me! Among all those born in former times there were none who did not die and the people being born now are also not free from death. The demon lord of death is very resourceful and cunning, while this illusory body, the form composed of the elements, is not trustworthy at all.⁶ When the time comes for the breath to leave the nostrils like a fine cobweb thread ⁷ those who are without the dharma will have nothing to help them, Mother, listen to my song!"

At first I, your daughter, believed in my husband.

As practice, I developed intense love

And as a result our minds became harmonious.

But when I die I will have to go alone.

In the end one's husband is also empty and unreliable.

I, your daughter, will not stay here.

I am going to the Dharma

As for cultivating love for a husband,

mother, you must do that yourself!

⁶It is without substantial essence

⁷ At the time of death.

Her mother replied; *“If you weave cloth for one or two years then you will have sufficient resources to finance your Dharma study. Otherwise you will be unable to enter the Dharma and wearing poor cloth, you will cause us shame.”*

Machig said; *“Among our people the men wear gowns on their bodies and ride on horses,⁸ yet I never heard that they could repel our enemy, the troubles of samsara. Our ladies wear nice soft cloth yet never have I heard that they could repel our enemy, the troubles of samsara.”*

“The ones who stay in empty places where there are no people, who wear a cave as their hat and drink only water and wear patched clothes - it is these persons that I have heard to be repelling the troubles of samsara. ” So even if the kalpas⁹ were to turn backwards, or if the sun was to rise in the west, or if someone should cut my throat, I will not do any weaving.”

And she sang this song to her mother.

“At first I believed in sheep.

As practice I did carding and weaving of wool and

as a result I became a good weaver.

Yet on the day I die I must go naked.

I doubt the reliability of nice soft cloth

for in the end it also is empty.

I, your daughter, will not stay here

but will go to the dharma.

As for being the owner of sheep,

mother, you must do that work yourself!”

Then her brother Khyega Khore approached her, *“Sister, you wish to practise dharma. Now in order to ask for the dharma, to request initiations, to take teachings, and for all such things you must have some resources. It is not possible to approach a Guru without having some offerings. And if you do practice while living as a beggar, the people will*

⁸It was the custom in her area for the chief to wear a fine gown when he led his men into battle.

⁹ Aeons, great expanses of time.

say that although you are from a good house, you have no food.¹⁰ Therefore you should first collect some wealth and then we will send you to the dharma."

Machig replied; *"Come now, elder brother, think well about what I say. Although you may have much wealth and all good things, yet at death you will have to go naked like a hair drawn out from a lump of butter. Although you may have innumerable brothers and relatives, you will still have to go like a hair pulled out from a lump of butter. But I have never heard of anyone who relied on the Three Jewels coming to die of hunger."* Then she sang this song to her brother:

*"At first I, your sister,
believed in food and wealth.
As practice I was mean and tight-fisted
with the result that I collected food and wealth.
Yet although I am wealthy,
on the day of my death I must go empty-handed.
I doubt the reliability of food and wealth
for in the end they are also empty.
As for being the owner of food and wealth,
brother, you must do that work yourself!
I, your sister, will not stay, I am going to the dharma."*

After she sang this, her brother was weeping and he said, *"Sister, you are correct. I am not able to practise Dharma myself but I will not make any obstacle for your Dharma practice."* Then he gave her three measures of gold.¹¹

But then her mother came and said; *"Now what are you children doing? What with one going to the dharma and the other giving money for the dharma!"* And then she took the gold out of Machig's hand.

At this Machig responded; *"Mother, you must think well about this. Our understanding is a little longer than a fox's tail ¹² and our human lives are shorter than a sheep's tail. The Lord of Death is lying in wait for us and this illusory body composed of the four elements will certainly be destroyed. Relatives and friends will gather round and we will have*

¹⁰ This would harm the reputation of her family.

¹¹ About half an ounce.

¹² That is to say not very great.

finished with all the good things we used to enjoy. When the breath ceases to move in and out only the Dharma will be of help - you look and see if there is anything else! I do not have your gold yet I will not die of hunger. Mother, you must listen to my song."

"We go to the north side ¹³ to cut grass

but we have no sickle

and so we, who wish grass,

must return empty handed.

We go to the forest on the south

but we have no axe

and so we, who wish wood,

must return empty handed.

Now when this human body has been gained,

we have no faith,

and so we will go empty handed

from these freedoms and opportunities.¹⁴

Perhaps we can contemplate returning empty handed,

but shameful actions and the load of ripening sins are very troublesome to bear.

Mother, be careful with samsara.

I, your daughter, will not stay here

but will go to the dharma.

Saying this she left to seek the dharma.

Machig considered what she knew of the various teachers and decided that Dampa Sangye at Lato village in Dingri Lakhor was a very excellent one. So she made up her mind to go there. On that very same day she left for Lakhor and at night on the road she met a sponsor called Dawa Zangpo. He said to her; "*Girl, you are very young. Why are you a beggar? Have all your parents and relatives died?*"

¹³ Generally in Tibet the north side of a hill or valley has much grass and the south side has deep forests. Since the Chinese occupation the latter is much less true

¹⁴ Arising from the precious human existence.

Machig replied; *"Father, mother, relatives and wealth - all these I have, but they are worldly notions. I have abandoned them all and am going now to practice the Dharma. It is said that Dampa Sangye is staying in Dingri Lakhor and so I am going there. I will request the dharma from him."*

The sponsor said; *"Girl, you are not an ordinary beggar. You have come here because your thoughts are on the holy Dharma. This is most wonderful. Yet you do not have any presents with which to request dharma teaching from the Guru so stay as my servant for one or two years and I will give you wages. Then with that in hand you will be able to ask for the dharma."*

Machig thought, *"He has spoken truly. I have no resources to use for practising the Dharma."* So she told him that her only choice was to do what he said and thus she became his paid servant.

Then a few months later she thought to herself, *"Why have you become like this? Previously you were not able to do such work and you felt sorrow at the state of samsara and then set out to find the dharma. But now you are working as a hired servant. Do you think you will not die?"*

These thoughts came in her mind so she said to her sponsor; *"Remembering my death I must go to the dharma."* and she told him that she could not remain as his servant.

The sponsor replied, *"If you must go to the dharma then I will give you a full measure ¹⁵ of gold as your wages for the time you have been here."* And he sent her on her way to the dharma.

Machig came to Dingri Lakhor and met Dampa Sangye. She made many prostrations to him and circumambulated him many times. Placing his feet upon her head, she acted with intense faith and devotion.

Dampa addressed his followers, *"You disciples who have assembled from the ten directions, place your offerings here in my small sleeping place. We teachers know the signs of connection, and I will explain the connections shown by the offerings."*¹⁶ The disciples presented their various offerings. With the gold the sponsor had given her and the remains of the alms she had collected, Machig had bought three ladders. She placed them against the three-storeyed house so that there was one ladder at each level.

Dampa asked who had offered the ladders. When she said that she had offered them, he said that this was the sign of a very good connection. *"Girl, you will completely upturn*

¹⁵Zho that is about one sixth of an ounce.

¹⁶ That is whether they show an auspicious karmic connection between guru and disciple and thereby indicate the disciple's future development.

and empty samsara of all the beings in the six realms by leading them up the ladder of the upper realms.¹⁷ Now girl, how old are you?"

"I am five by three years, that is, my age is fifteen."

Dampa said; "That is also very good You will become a lamp to dispel the darkness of ignorance from all the beings in the three worlds¹⁸. Therefore your name is Daepai Dronme. ¹⁹ Girl, your faith is not strong one day and weak the next, but is always consistent and straight like a bow-string. It is my duty to give you instruction."

During the following days he taught her the *Gegs-Sel lNga*, the *Ro-sNyoms sKor-Drug*, an explanation of the *Phyag-rGya Chhen-Po lNga* within which there is also the pacification of the afflictions, and the cycles of the *Zhi-Byed-Pa*, and also many other instructions.²⁰

Then Dampa said; "Girl, you should not stay here. It is better for you to go to Central Tibet, to the place called Lhatag where there are monks who show the outer form of Kadampa ²¹ yet are tantric meditators within. You should practice above their monastery and by this you will come to benefit beings equalling the extent of the sky."

Thus Machig received her Guru's prediction and in accordance with it she went to central Tibet to the area above Lhatag which was empty and uninhabited. There, in an empty and ownerless cave, she meditated while practising austerities and drinking only water.

In the lower part of that area there were five or six groups of herders. In former years these herders had given a curd festival for the monks of Lhatag during the summer month. But that year no rain had fallen from the sky and because of that no grass had grown on the hills. In consequence the yak-cows ²² had no milk and so there could be no curd festival at Lhatag.

The Abbot led the monks in reading texts, making ritual offerings, doing rain-calling practices and so on but still no rain came and so there was no curd. The yak-herders gathered together and felt very sad. They led their cows out on to the hills and the cattle of one of the herders went towards the place where Machig was staying. Following them, he came to see the cave she occupied. Machig's mind was in the state of absorbed contemplation of the unchanging natural condition.²³ Her hair had become yellow and her eyebrows were red. Her hands were in the meditation gesture in her lap. Her eyes stared

¹⁷ The realms of humans, asuras and gods.

¹⁸The worlds of desire, form and the formless.

¹⁹Lamp of Faith.

²⁰These texts are meditation instructions dealing with calming the mind and developing understanding of the way thoughts arise.

²¹The followers of this sect were the precursors of the Gelugpa and were known for their monastic discipline and rigorous practice.

²²Bri. gYag .

²³Chos. Nyid. Mi. 'Gyur. Ba'i. Ting. Nge. Dzin .

up at the sky and her body was shining and splendid. Seeing her, faith was born in the herder and he made prostrations and circumambulated her.

Then Machig asked him, *“O you who have faith and devotion, which siddhi ²⁵ do you wish?”*

The herder did not know how to request Dharma instructions so he asked for the siddhi of encouraging milk to flow.

Machig said *“You do not know how to ask for siddhis.²⁶ But anyway, to give you the siddhi you asked for is not difficult. Have you some wool?”*

He said yes and took some from his shoulder bag, spun a length of yarn and gave that to her. She tied a few knots in it and said it should be put on the cows' necks and she gave him some earth from beneath her seat and from under her feet, saying that it should be thrown at the herd. He threw it and the cows' udders became full of milk. When he saw this he was very happy and led his cattle home.

One old monk saw him and said; *“Unfortunate herder! In this year no rain has fallen and so on the hills there is no grass with the result that the cattle have no milk. Now there can be no curd festival for the monastery of Lhatag. Why are you taking your cattle in at mid-day? You must be mad!”*

To this the herder replied; *“Reverend monk, the cattle have much milk and I will milk them and from that I will have much curd.”* That night he made curd and the next morning he went to Lhatag to the sound of conch-shell horns and wooden drums. All the sangha welcomed him into the college temple and the curd festival commenced.

The Abbot addressed the assembly, *“Now pay attention all of you sponsor herdsmen. From the time of the Buddha up until now the spreading of the Buddha's Doctrines has been due to our sangha's kindness. Not only that but our sangha has very great blessing”.*²⁶ The herder, who was sitting in a lower place by a pillar, stood up and made three prostrations. Then he addressed the head monk. *“Kye! Kye! Reverend Abbot! The spreading of the Buddha's doctrines is due no doubt to your sangha's kindness. But the milk that has now come from the cows and the resulting curd festival - these are not due to your kindness.”*

“That child is talking nonsense,” the Abbot cried and he beat him in the face with three sticks. *“We monks are like gold. If blessing does not come from us, then where else can it come from?”*

The herder then told the whole story of Machig Labdron. On hearing this the Abbot declared; *“One old heretic lady is staying above our village. Some of you teachers who*

²⁵ Blessing or attainment.

²⁶ That is, you do not ask for an important one.

²⁶ i.e. it is responsible for the curd festival being possible.

are well trained in the dharma must go and defeat her in debate and then tie a black rope around her neck and bring her here.”

So some of the great teachers went out, and when they came to the place where Machig was staying they felt very happy owing to her blessing. When they came before her and saw her body they felt an irreversible and inconceivably intense faith and devotion. It was impossible for them to debate with her or to put the rope around her neck. Instead they requested many teachings from her for removing wrong ideas and then they returned very peacefully to the monastery.

The Abbot asked them if they had defeated her in debate and put the rope around her neck. But when they explained about Machig’s appearance and blessings the Abbot became very angry. *“These hopeless people still have their white infant’s teeth when their hair has grown white. They are not even able to defeat one girl with arguments of clear definition. Now I myself will go so bring my horse.”* Then he departed.

At the door of the rock cave where Machig was staying a great throne was constructed and on top of this the Abbot took his seat. At both his right and left sides he placed very wise Dharma teachers and then he addressed Machig; *“Girl, what are you doing? Here in this place where there is no grass, no water and no source of food you, a woman, stay alone! Do you stay here for relaxation or for some purpose?”*

In reply to the Abbot’s question, Machig sang as follows:

*I am the beggar Labdron
who goes to the fearsome hermitage.
Relaxed? Yes, I am relaxed.
Busy? Well, yes I am busy.
Relaxed
because I have not the least cause for activity.
And busy
because I am without even a moment of wavering or idleness.
I, the beggar, am never separated from the teachings.
This beggar does not trust the enemy, samsara.*

The Abbot then commented; *“Girl, these words of yours are not wrong. Well now, do you stay in this high place in hunger or in plenty?”*

To this she again replied with a song:

I am the beggar Labdron who lives in the mountain hermitage.

Is this beggar hungry?

Yes, I am hungry.

And has she plenty?

Yes, plenty.

I am very hungry for I have not the least food.

I am very wealthy for I practise the state of dharmata.

I have the doctrines of the dharma conduct, free of decline.

This beggar does not trust avarice and tight selfishness!

Thus she sang.

“*These words of yours are not wrong. Well now girl, do you stay here well or do you stay here badly?*” responded the Abbot to which Machig replied:

I am the beggar Labdron living in the mountain hermitage.

Good? Well, yes, it is good.

Bad? Yes, it is also bad.

Good, for I hold the lineage of the siddhas.

Bad, since my circle of associates is only beggars.

I have doctrines of the holy dharma, that is equal and free of bias.

This beggar does not trust the enemy of the eight worldly dharmas.²⁸

Then the Abbot said; “*Girl, your three verses have not been wrong. But here in this desolate place, do you stay bravely or in fear?*”

Again Machig gave reply;

I am the beggar Labdron who goes to the fearsome hermitage.

²⁸ Hope for praise and fear of blame; hope for gain and fear of loss; hope for fame and fear of notoriety; hope for happiness and fear of sorrow.

Brave? Yes I am brave.

Cowardly? Yes, I am also afraid.

Brave, because I go to the very fearful snow mountains.

Cowardly, because I am afraid of the sufferings of samsara.

This beggar does not trust this beloved illusory body,

I, the beggar, have doctrines of the direct dharma.

Then the Abbot asked her to come out of her cave and she replied; *“I acted with the cause of ignorance and had a little of the condition²⁹ of fully dualistic discrimination. But now I have gone directly into the state of the unborn Dharmakaya and so I have come out!”*

Again the Abbot told her to come out and so she said, *“Before, I had some sense of shame but I came out of that some years ago.”*

“But Girl, now you really must come out!”

“Well, if you order me to come out, then I really must do so!” So then she came out of the door dancing with her eyes staring very strongly at both the sky and the ground, and her hair bright yellow, and thus the Abbot saw her.

And just from seeing her face, faith developed in the Abbot. *“You are Ama Labdron. With the body of an ordinary woman, you are really a jnana dakini³⁰ possessing the understanding of all the Buddhas of the three times. I did not recognise you so please forgive me. We are from the monastery of Lhatag. Please come there and we will make you a senior nun.³¹ Then please act as our teacher.”*

Machig replied; *“It is not mentioned in the Doctrine that a nun can act as head of a group of monks and it is not traditional. Also, I do not have the dress of a nun. Regarding that, I will sing you a song.”* Then to the Abbot and to the principal teachers she sang this song called ‘The Song of the Nun’s Nature of Machig’s Mind’:

I am the beggar who has gone to the fearsome hermitage.

I need a hat but I have no cloth so

I wear the hat of the highest view.

I need nun’s shoes but I lack the materials, so

²⁹ rKhyen.

³⁰ A wisdom goddess who has the same nature as the Buddha.

³¹ That is one who has been long ordained and is of high status.

I wear the shoes of ascending good conduct.

I need rainbow coloured cloth but I have no sheep, so

I use the sheep of shame and hard work.

*I need a nun's skirt but I have no woollen cloth, so
as a beggar I am beautiful with the ornaments of morality.*

If you wash your face,³² then your face becomes cold so

I wash out the sins and obscurations of my body, speech and mind.

Due to my weakness and sick liver I, the beggar, cannot distinguish the highest view so

I keep the four root vows.³³

The monks who hope to keep their vows pure are happy, aren't they?

The monks who think about protecting their vows have joy, don't they?³⁴

The Abbot felt much faith and said: “Respected Machig, you may not act as a nun, yet for dharma practitioners in general, and especially for those who stay in mountain hermitages, the view, meditation and conduct are most important. So please give us your thoughts on this, together with some examples.”

Machig answered him; “Last year or so I had a practice with view, meditation and conduct. But for some time now I have cut the connection with them so you should listen to my song.” And then she sang this song:

I am the beggar Machig who stays in the mountain hermitage.

I had one dharma view

but by destroying all biased grasping it has become empty and has vanished.³⁵

I had one meditation

but by destroying both dullness and wildness in my mind, it became empty and vanished.

I had one conduct

³² Nuns are supposed to keep themselves clean.

³³ No killing, lying, stealing or sexual immorality.

³⁴ She is saying they all have cloth and things she cannot have and so they are better off than her and should be happy. So, really, she is mocking them.

³⁵ That is, there was no longer any reason to employ it.

but by destroying all contrived acting to impress others, it became empty and vanished.

I have one vow and that I must keep.

But you monks have a view, meditation and conduct and so you should be happy!

With this the Abbot's faith became much stronger and he inquired of her, "*Respected Machig, when you first came to the dharma did you practice much self-abnegation? Were you married or not? Why did you not stay in your own country? Do you have relatives on your father's side and on your mother's? Do you have wealth and possessions?*"

Machig replied; "*I was married and had both paternal and maternal relations. But I saw that all these belonged to confusion and so I came to the dharma. Now listen to this song of mine.*"

"I am Labdron who stays in the mountain hermitage.

I wanted to practise the dharma in my district and homeland,

but the fatherland is a demon's prison which I found to be most deceptive.

I have no desire for the restless minds of the fatherland.³⁶

Now, without being partial,

I keep all places as my fatherland and so my mind is very happy.

I wanted to practise the dharma in the company of my paternal relations,

but their pride was as high as a mountain over which the sun of the wisdom of natural awareness can never rise.

Therefore this beggar has abandoned her paternal relatives.

Now I take the kind Gurus as my father's relations.

I make the doctrines my paternal group and so my mind is very happy.

I wanted to practise the dharma in the company of my maternal relations,

but they were like a pot of poison within which there was no place to put the liberating elixir of dharma instructions.

Therefore this beggar abandoned her maternal relatives.

Now I take my fellow dharma practitioners as my maternal relations.

³⁶ All people there are constantly disturbed by their samsaric tendencies.

Having the full breast of the dharma, my mind is very happy.

This beggar wanted to practise the dharma in the company of her husband.

But he was like a yoke of evil and so she was powerless to find opportunities for practice.

Therefore this beggar has abandoned her husband.

Now I have found the husband of self-existing wisdom.

Trying to always please her friend, this beggar's mind is very happy.

This beggar wanted to practise the dharma in the company of her sons.

But sons are a rope that binds one to samsara and then there is no time to get out of the swamp of the sufferings of samsara.

Therefore this beggar has abandoned her sons.

Now as a son I have gained the small boy ³⁷ of awareness.

With this unborn and undying son, my mind is very happy.

This beggar wanted to practise the dharma in the company of wealth and possessions.

But wealth and possessions are like a demon's rope and so her mind was strongly bound with sorrow.

Therefore this beggar has abandoned her wealth and possessions.

Now I have opened the door of a treasure of undiminishing wealth and, having the stainless supply of easy ³⁸ food, my mind is always very happy.

Thus I make the auspicious offering of this song of the six joys of my mind.

By hearing this the Abbot gained unchanging faith and he felt that all the sufferings of his body were ended. Then he made this request.

“Respected Machig, you will not stay as head of our monastery of Lhatag, but we also have a place of retreat called Zangri Kharmar. Please, you must accept headship there!”

Machig said this was more suitable. Then she went to Zang-Ri mKhar-dMar when she was eighteen years of age and remained there until she was eighty eight during which period she helped beings equalling in number the extent of the sky.

³⁷ This awareness is always new and fresh like a small boy free of strong habits.

³⁸ Her desire was finished and so she could live easily on very little.

Then, at the time of her death, she sang this song to her disciples, called *'The Teachings given to Disciples'*:

This beggar lady who stays in a mountain hermitage will sing a song for you fortunate meditators present here.

That the experiences of practice may clearly arise,

I have the doctrines of consciousness transference.

I give them to my disciples on the stages of blessing. Be happy my disciples!

That one may be completely freed from habitual hopes,

I have the doctrines of offering one's flesh and blood ³⁸

I give them to my disciples on the stages of the path. Be happy, my disciples!

That dualistic mental activity may be completely destroyed,

I have the excellent doctrines of freedom from activity ⁴⁰

I give them to my disciples on the stages of the teaching of the path.

Be happy, my disciples!

That all difficulties may be used as helpers,

I have the doctrines which show how to liberate whatever is arising in the mind.

I give them to my disciples on the stages of the destruction of the maras (illusions).

Be happy, my disciples!

That the treasure of benefit for others may be opened,

I have the doctrines of the mental training of aspiration and practice Bodhicitta.

I give this teaching on benefiting others to my disciples.

Be happy, my disciples!

Oh! In order that mother and son will never separate,

you disciples must make offerings and say prayers.

³⁹ i.e. gChod .

⁴⁰ Sunyata, emptiness.

I open the treasure of benefit for both self and others and give it to you.

Do not feel sorrow, my children!

In general I will liberate all beings in the six realms of samsara.

And especially I must free from samsara all those who pray to Zangri Kharmar.⁴¹

Thus she promised. Then she showed the mode of passing into nirvana.

Regarding her death, those of high, intermediate and low understanding saw different things. The most advanced ones saw Machig herself become enveloped within mist and clouds. Then she went off beating her drum, blowing her thigh-bone horn and shaking her six bone ornaments. They saw the dakinis of the five families bear her aloft and carry her off.

Those disciples of middle development saw Machig's body shrink in size until it was like an arura nut ⁴² Then it vanished into white light.

The ordinary disciples saw her body take a great fever and then she had a long sickness and died. The actual body of Machig is still preserved in Zangri Kharmar.

Machig Labdron herself taught; *“For the practice of Chod and all its doctrines, you must perform taking refuge, developing bodhicitta, consciousness transference, devoted prayer ⁴³ and making assembled offerings.”*

Machig Labdron's songs and this secret biography have been written down in order to benefit the practice of great meditators.

⁴¹ i.e. the place of Machig Labdron.

⁴² About one inch in height.

⁴³ To the lineage.