

## THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 5 – Perseverence

Marpa had asked Milarepa to build a tower for his son, and he said that afterward he would teach Milarepa *and* provide his food and clothing.

Milarepa asked Marpa, “Do you wish to tell me about the plan of the tower?”

Marpa was thinking, this is a way for Milarepa to make up for the evil deeds he has done, by doing very hard work in service to the guru.

Marpa said, “Build a tower like this on the eastern crest of that mountain.”

So Milarepa began to build a round tower. He had to find the right place to put the tower, and he made the soil level where the tower would stand. Then, all alone, he had to collect many stones, and mix certain types of earth with water to make mortar for the stones to stick together. He worked very hard to find the right sizes of stones, and carry them on his back to the eastern crest of the mountain. He began building the base, or foundation, of the tower, very carefully. Then he had to collect more stones, and mix more mortar, and he laid the first layers of stones to build the tower.



He worked all day in the hot sun, wind or rain, to carefully build a sturdy, perfect round tower for his precious lama.

When it was about half finished, Marpa came out one day to see Milarepa working on the tower. Milarepa thought his guru would be pleased with his progress.

But Marpa looked at the tower, and said, “The other day I had not fully considered the matter. Tear down this tower and take the earth and stones back to their places.”

Milarepa, thinking his guru might be testing him, did what he was told. He used his simple tools to knock out each of the stones he had so carefully placed in the tower walls. Then he carried loads of stones on his back, and took them to the areas he had found them, and scattered them on the

ground.



He chiseled out the chunks of mortar that he had so carefully spread over the stones, and carried full baskets of the mortar chunks to the areas he had dug out the earth to make the mortar, and returned the mortar to the soil. Finally, there was nothing left where the half tower had stood.

Some time later, when Marpa and Milarepa were on the western crest of the mountain, Marpa was pretending to be drunk. He drew a half circle in the dirt with a stick, and said,

“Make a tower similar to this.”



So Milarepa went through the same process as before, flattening the earth where he will build the tower, and collected stones, carrying them on his back.

He dug certain types of earth to make mortar, and worked very hard, all alone, day after day, week after week, to build the tower carefully for his precious guru.

The tower was almost half completed when Marpa came out to visit Milarepa. Marpa said,

“It is not yet right. Tear it down and carry the earth and stones back to where you got them.”

Again? After all that work? But Milarepa knew he had to do as his guru told him to do. And after much extreme effort, the tower was torn down, stone by stone, by Milarepa working alone with only simple tools. And all the stones were placed back in the areas where he had found them.

Then one day Marpa and Milarepa went to the top of the mountain to the north, and Marpa said, “Great Magician, the other day I was drunk and did not give you good direction. Build a sturdy tower here.”

Milarepa had to express his frustration. He couldn't bear to go through this again. He exclaimed,

“To tear something down while it is being built makes me miserable and is a waste of your wealth. Please think carefully beforehand!”

Marpa replied, “Today I am not drunk. I have thought about it very carefully. This tower will be called Tower of the Tantric Yogi. It should be triangular. Build it. It will not be torn down.”



Milarepa began again to create a foundation, find the right stones, carry them on his back, dig the earth, mix the mortar, lay the stones, and cover them with mortar. Day after day, week after week, his muscles becoming sore and tired.

When it was about one third finished, Marpa came to visit. He looked surprised, and said,

“Great Magician, for whom are you building this tower? Who gave you the instructions?”

Milarepa was shocked – of course, Marpa had told him to. What could he say? He didn’t want to be disrespectful, and he simply replied,

“It was the lama himself who ordered this tower for his son.”

Marpa made a confused face and said, “I don’t remember having given you such orders. If you are right, I must be crazy. Have I completely lost my mind?”

Milarepa replied, “I clearly remember suspecting it would be like this and respectfully asking you to think about it carefully. You replied it was fully thought out and that this tower would not be demolished.”

Marpa said, “Very well then, who is your witness? Who heard me say that? Perhaps you are thinking of shutting us up in your triangular tower, as in a magic triangle, and casting spells on us; yet we have not robbed you of your inheritance, we have not robbed you of your father’s goods. If that is not so and if you wish for the Dharma teachings, since you have displeased the gods of the area, go and put this earth and these stones back in their places. Afterward, if you want the teaching, I will give it to you. If you will not do this, then leave.”

As he spoke he looked more and more angry. Milarepa felt overwhelmed with grief, ashamed of the terrible things he had done with magic, and unable to please his guru. After all the work he had so carefully done with devotion, now he had to tear it down. Again.

Yet he still deeply desired the Dharma teachings. He obeyed, and began the slow, tedious process of chiseling out the stones and mortar.



He carried baskets filled with the mortar back to where he had dug out the earth. And he carried the heavy stones on his back to return them to where he had found them.

Then he noticed that he had a big sore on his shoulders from carrying the heavy stones and baskets. He thought, "If I show this to my lama, he will only get disgusted with me. If I show it to his wife, then I will seem to be complaining about my work."

So, without showing it to anyone, he tearfully begged the lama's wife to help him to receive the Dharma teaching. The wife went before Marpa and said,

"The useless work on the towers has only brought grief to Great Magician. Have compassion and grant him the teaching."

The lama replied, "Prepare him a good meal and bring him to me."

Dakmema prepared the meal and brought Milarepa to her husband, who said, "Great Magician, do not tell lies about something I have not done. Since you desire the teaching, I will give it to you."

He taught Milarepa the Three Refuges, taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha (the people who practice the Dharma), and the basic teachings. He said, "This is the basic law for everyone. But if you want the secret teaching, here is what must be done." He told about how Naropa had to go through terrible difficulties before he could receive the Dharma teachings from Tilopa. Then Marpa said, "For you, this way will be difficult."

As he was listening, Milarepa's faith in the preciousness of the teachings increased, and he had tears in his eyes. He swore to carry out everything his lama asked him to do.

After several days, Marpa took Milarepa for a walk, and then when he reached a certain place, he stopped and said, "Build in this place a square white tower, nine stories high with a structure at the top, forming ten stories. It will never be torn down. When you have finished, I will give you the secret teaching. Then you may just meditate in retreat, and during that time I will provide for your food and all your needs."

Milarepa had some doubts, and said, "Then wouldn't it be good for your wife to be a witness to all these promises?"

"Very well," Marpa said. He traced in the dirt with a stick the outline of where the tower should be placed. Milarepa brought Dakmema there with Marpa and said to her,

"I have already built three towers and have destroyed them. The first time the lama said he had not given it enough thought. The second time the lama said that he was drunk. The third time he wondered if he were crazy, or if he had lost his mind and no longer remembered anything. When I reminded him of the instructions he had given me, he asked me who was a witness, who had heard that and he blamed me. Now that I have called you to hear these new promises, please be my witness."

Dakmema replied, "I am glad to be a witness. But it will be very difficult for my words to mean anything since the lama is the one in control. He builds without reason and destroys without reason. No matter what I say, the lama will not listen."

The lama said to his wife, "You can be the witness. And I will act according to my promise. Great Magician, if you have no trust, and if you won't make a promise, then go away."

So Milarepa laid the foundation for a square tower. While he was starting to build the wall, three other students of Marpa playfully rolled a large rock to the wall and placed it as the cornerstone.

Milarepa continued building to the second story on both sides of the large door. Marpa, pointing a finger at the large boulder which was the cornerstone, said, "Great Magician, where did this stone come from?"

Milarepa answered, "Your three best students brought it here."

"Well, you must not put one of their stones in the structure you are building. So take it out and put it where it was."

Milarepa was upset, and said, "You promised that this tower would not be destroyed."

Marpa said, "Quite right. It is not proper for you to be served by my students who are practicing at the advanced stage of learning. Do not demolish everything, but take away the stone and put it back where it was."



So Milarepa demolished the building from the top down and returned the rock to its place.

Marpa returned later and said, "Now, fetch the stone again and put it back as the cornerstone."

Milarepa put it back. Alone, he had to have as much strength as the three students carrying the stone. So he called it "My Giant Stone."

Meanwhile, Marpa's cousins were watching Milarepa building the tower on land that was owned not just by Marpa but by their families, too. One of them said to the others,

"Marpa has gone crazy. He has some beginner student with great strength who is building towers on every ridge of the mountain, and then he demolishes them and returns all the stone and earth to where they came from. He will demolish this one too. If he doesn't tear it down, then let's stop him from finishing the tower. Let's see what he's going to do."

By the time Milarepa had finished the 7<sup>th</sup> story of the tower, he had another sore on his back from carrying all the stones.

The cousins said to each other, "He isn't tearing this one down. Let's demolish it ourselves." So they prepared to destroy it. But Marpa made illusions of phantom soldiers with armor, and put them everywhere inside and outside the tower. The cousins said, "Where did Marpa get all these soldiers?" They were terrified and dared not attack the tower. Each one secretly bowed to Marpa and they all decided to be students and supporters of Marpa.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. After he built about half of the first tower, what did Marpa ask him to do? (tear it down)
2. How many towers did Marpa have him build, and then tear down? (3)
3. How did Milarepa try to make sure that he wouldn't have to tear down the 4<sup>th</sup> tower? (asked Marpa's wife to be a witness to the promises from Marpa)

4. What promise did Marpa make about the 4<sup>th</sup> tower? (that it would never be torn down)
5. What else did Marpa promise Milarepa? (that he would teach Milarepa the secret teachings when it is done, and then Milarepa can go in retreat to meditate and Marpa will provide for all Milarepa's food and needs)
6. What did some other students do when Milarepa was building the 4<sup>th</sup> tower? (put a big stone as the cornerstone)
7. What did Marpa tell him to do with the big stone? (remove it and then put it back again)
8. How did Marpa save the tower from being destroyed by his cousins? (made an illusion of soldiers inside and outside the tower)

#### DHARMA DISCUSSION – PERSEVERENCE:

*“Cracking the whip of effort, I break up the clods of the five poisons. I cast out the stones of a defiled heart, and weed out all hypocrisy. I cut the stalks and reap the fruit of action leading to liberation. . . .*

*I urge all those who work for Enlightenment to meditate with perseverance and effort. Endurance and effort overcome the greatest of difficulties. May there be no obstacles for those who seek Enlightenment.”*

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa, p. 113)

*“Perseverance, endurance, and faith, these three . . . these are ever the guides on the path.”*

- Milarepa (100,000 Songs, p. 79)

What is perseverance? It means to keep trying, even if it is very difficult.  
It might slow and frustrating, and even if you fail, you keep trying.  
It means to keep doing something over and over again until you get it right.  
Then once you learn it, it becomes easy to do.

When we were toddlers, we learned to walk. At first we only held our parent's hands.  
Then on our own we took a few steps and wobbled and fell. Again and again.  
We had great perseverance to learn to walk! And once we learned, it is so easy!  
It's natural for a young child to have perseverance to learn to walk, and read, swim, and ride a bike. Or do learn to do something we really love to do.  
But when we get older, sometimes we don't have the perseverance to do something that takes a lot of effort, and that doesn't seem like fun. Or we don't want to do it unless we get a reward.

But some of the most important things we learn don't give us an immediate reward.  
And all people who are very successful in life, in their career, or a sports or in the arts -

all of them have the quality of perseverance. They suffered through training, practice, failing, and trying again and again.

We may not think meditation is fun, and we wonder why we should try to do it. But after years of practice that might seem boring or even a waste of time, you see the benefits, the rewards: you can become calm even in the most upsetting situations, You can think clearly and concentrate well, and you enjoy the extremely peaceful, blissful experience of meditation.

To be able to do any great accomplishment, it is important to be able to persevere, try and try through all the difficulties, frustrations and failures, until you succeed.

#### ACTIVITY – Crossword Tower:

Fill in the answers on the crossword tower, next page. It might take some perseverance to finish, especially if students try not to look at the word box for the answers.

#### Across:

1. The name Milarepa's father gave him when he was born
2. The wife of Marpa
3. The first yogi in the Kagyu lineage of gurus
4. The sister of Milarepa
5. The guru of Milarepa
6. Milarepa \_\_\_\_\_stones on his back to build
7. Milarepa and his mother had \_\_\_\_\_ that the neighbors would kill them
8. Milarepa's mother wanted \_\_\_\_\_against the aunt and uncle
9. The second yogi in the Kagyu lineage of gurus, and Marpa's guru

#### Down:

1. The name Marpa gave Milarepa
2. What Marpa told Milarepa to build
3. The feeling Milarepa had when he sent the hailstorm
4. What ruined the harvest so the villagers wouldn't have food
5. The aunt and uncle had too much \_\_\_\_\_ for property and nice things
6. Milarepa had to \_\_\_\_\_ to build and then take apart three towers
7. Milarepa, his mother, aunt and uncle didn't think about the results of their \_\_\_\_\_ when they committed evil deeds.
8. A man who dedicates his life to meditation

#### Word box:

Persevere	GreatMagician	Carried	Tilopa	GoodNews
Dakmema	Naropa	Peta	Karma	
Marpa	Anger	Greed	Revenge	
Tower	Hailstorm	Fear	Yogi	



CROSSWORD TOWER

