

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 32 – Harmful Friends

Milarepa was staying in the Nyanang Belly Cave, which was in an area where many people practiced an ancient religion called Bön, that existed in Tibet before Buddhism. One of these Bön practitioners was a rich man who also believed in Buddhist Dharma. He secretly had visited Milarepa and given him offerings, and received teachings from him.

The rich man became very ill with a deadly illness. As he was laying in his bed dying, all of his relatives gathered at his house. Knowing that he would die soon, he told them,



“When I die, offer all of my wealth and belongings to the master Jetsun Milarepa and his students, and ask them to perform my funeral ceremonies. In this life you all have followed Bön religion, but in the next life you should follow the Buddhist Dharma - it is so good for everyone.”

But the people who were gathered there didn't want to hear that. They didn't want anything to do with Buddhist Dharma. They liked only their Bön religion.

The rich man was worried that they wouldn't invite Milarepa and his

students. So, he said to one of the girls there, “Go get me a knife.”

The girl asked, “What are you going to do with it?”

He replied, “Since no one will listen to my requests, I will kill myself. You all probably will have bad luck because you didn't listen to my requests.”

The people then agreed to do what he requested.

He said, “Don't ruin my funeral ceremony for the next life by doing our Bön rituals. Invite Jetsun Milarepa here.” Those were his last words. He died right after he said those words.

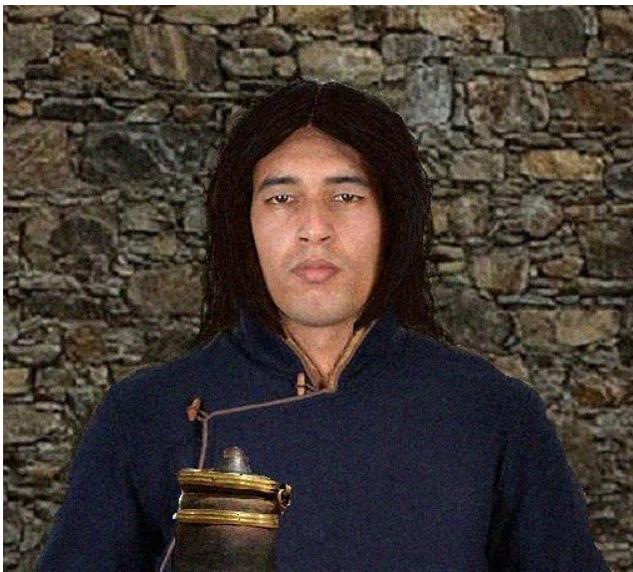
Then according to his last wishes, they invited the master Milarepa and several of his students to come. The Bön people showed Milarepa and his students to the upper level of the house and told them to wait.



On the lower level of the house, the people performed their Bön ceremonies.

Men chanted and blew horns made of human leg bones, and played small drums made of the tops of two human skulls.

During the ceremony, suddenly some of the people noticed that the man who died appeared to be standing next to the shrine that the people had built for the ceremony.



The man was wearing the same blue shirt that he was wearing when he died, and he was drinking beer.

Peta, Milarepa's sister, was among the people gathered at the house, and she noticed the man standing there.

One of the Bön people said to her, "Milarepa and his gang are always disagreeing with us, but, look! Our Bön practice has actually brought a man back from the dead! Milarepa's practice has never done that!"

Other people agreed, smiling and commenting that Milarepa is nothing compared to their powerful Bön religion.

Peta ran upstairs to tell Milarepa what was happening.

Milarepa told her, "That isn't the man coming back from the dead. This is something else they conjured up to make others believe in their practice. Shiwa Ö, you go down to them, take that spirit by his ring finger, and ask him what was the secret name that Jetsun Milarepa gave him at the Nyanang Belly Cave when he was given the empowerment."

Shiwa Ö went downstairs, and walked toward the spirit that had appeared in the form of the dead man in the blue shirt with the beer. As Shiwa Ö got near, the spirit backed away and put his hands in front of his face as if shielding himself from Shiwa Ö. The spirit couldn't stand the brilliance of Milarepa's compassion that was shining from Shiwa Ö.

The spirit said, "I will go. I am the thug of the Bön people – I am a ghost named Ramizin. The Bön people's practice is useless, so I have come to act as their bully."

Then Shiwa Ö chased the ghost outside and down between the houses. It ran to the mountain nearby where it changed its form into a wolf and then disappeared.

People in the house saw that and told the others, so they all realized that the man in the blue shirt was not really the man who died. Milarepa came downstairs and told them,

"Your Bön dharma shows the way for death to come. But I show the way for those who have died."

The relatives of the man who died asked him, "Jetsun, do you see the one who died? If you can't see him, how can you show him the path?"

Milarepa answered, "I see him. Because of the negative karma that he had committed before, and because he didn't develop quite enough good qualities, he has been born as a small, long-bodied bug in the valley, under a mound of dried poop. I will go now and take him to the place where he can be free from his negative karma."

One of the people said, "Then let us see this so we can believe you. Show us how you make a bug free from karma."

"Very well, let's go," Milarepa said.

Then they all walked together into the valley, and soon Milarepa stopped and sat down on the ground next to a mound of animal poop. Milarepa called out the man's secret name, and said, "I am your guru, Milarepa! Come here!"



Then out from under the poop came the bug with the long body. It walked toward Milarepa.

Then it crawled onto his lap and lay there. Milarepa spoke about Dharma and then did something shocking.



The people saw the bug's wings spread out, and light rays shone from the bug's body into Milarepa's chest. The light in his chest became a glowing white Tibetan letter "Ah." The letter "Ah" shot out from Milarepa's chest into the sky, and went higher and higher in the sky.

The people heard the voice of the man who died coming from the letter "Ah" in the sky, and the voice said,

"The precious Jetsun has placed me in the bliss, the ultimate peace and happiness, of liberation. Thank you!"

Seeing and hearing that, the people now believed that the man had become liberated, free of his karma, because Milarepa took all of his negative karma. The people prostrated, bowing on the ground to Milarepa, and said, "How incredible! How wondrous!"

Milarepa said, "There are many more wondrous things than this." Then he sang a song telling that his guru Marpa was a great wonder, the instructions he received from his guru was a great wonder; that it is a great wonder that he doesn't care about praise or blame, success or failure, being popular or unpopular, pleasantness or unpleasantness; and that it is a great wonder that faith arose in the people gathered there.

The relatives of the man who died said that his faith in Milarepa was correct, it was not a mistake, and that in order to reach buddhahood when they die, they must do just as he did.

Repa Shiwa Ö said, "We all need a guide for the path to buddhahood like the one we have here today. But to meet one and have devotion toward him is very difficult." The people realized how lucky they were to have Milarepa with them.

According to the tradition, Milarepa performed ceremonies once a week for the man who died.

One day, Milarepa's sister Peta said to him, with tears in her eyes, "Brother, you have performed the weekly ceremonies for the dead here, but you didn't do anything for our very own parents."

Milarepa took his sister's hand and said, "Peta, you don't need to cry. To repay the kindness of both of our parents, the minds of our parents - who were confused and wandering in the afterlife place called bardo - were called by my deep meditation. During the time I was practicing meditation, the mantra of love and compassion purified their impurities, day and night. They won't take a rebirth in any of the six worlds of samsara. They were placed in the blissful pure world of delight and joy called Sukhavati. You don't need to worry, my dear sister Peta."



Peta said, "This is wonderful! What sort of ritual did you perform for them?"

Milarepa answered that his own practice of meditation performed with his pure mind, with the blessings of the gurus of his lineage, also purified the minds of their parents and granted their wishes. He said that by remembering the kindness of his guru Marpa again and again, he repaid the kindness of his parents.

Then Peta relaxed and understood.

But Milarepa was very concerned that she wasn't meditating much or practicing Dharma. He wanted to encourage her to do so by singing her a song. Here are some words from his song:

"Listen now, my sister Peta.

Since you were young, you didn't try very hard to practice Dharma.

To think that you'll practice when you're old, what good will that do?

If you don't rely on the Jetsun Milarepa guru,

What good will friendly gurus do?

Not receiving the Kagyu whispered lineage instructions,

What good will useless teachings do?

If you don't know your own mind, what good will lots of training do?

Those who don't try to understand their own reality, which is not born [and does not die],

Become more negative with wrong philosophy.

Those who don't have inner experiences from meditation

Pretend to have great experiences, and just put on a show for others.

Those who don't understand that everything is interdependent

Have doubts, but think they are great.

People who criticize others and show off but don't have bodhicitta and compassion
have much purifying to do.

Those who don't think about reaching buddhahood
Say they love Dharma but secretly only want wealth.
For those who don't aim to benefit all sentient beings,
Their parents' kindness becomes a cause for more suffering in samsara."

Milarepa knew that she didn't practice Dharma because her friends didn't act according to the Dharma, so they were a negative influence on her. He taught her about this in a song,

"Those who don't practice [or act] according to the Dharma
May be close friends but later become enemies.
Those who actually are harming their friends
May seem beautiful, but they are like demons. . .
Those who don't help and don't have patience wherever they can,
Though they act like a good friend, have many regrets."

After he sang, Peta meditated and had an excellent experience from her meditation. Milarepa was pleased, and he gave her more teachings so she would live according to the Dharma and not be led away from it by the negative influences of other people. He sang,

"Listen again, dear sister Peta.
If you [stay with and] don't turn away from Dharma,
Your suffering will go away completely.
If you don't say harsh things to others,
You will be seen by others as a god.
If you don't wish others harm,
Your merit will increase.
If you don't have too much attachment to this life,
Your next life will be happy and pleasant.
When you don't develop vanity and pride,
You'll get a pleasing and beautiful body.
If you can meditate on your mind's own nature
You'll quickly reach buddhahood. . . .
If you don't have desire for worldly happiness
You'll purify your negative karmas. . . .
If your behavior is in accordance with Dharma,
The Dharma protectors and dakas [helpful wise spirits] will protect you. . .
Understand this and put it into practice.
May you always enjoy bliss and glory."

Peta then went to meditate in the mountains, and became a great meditator and one of the four close female students who were like daughters of Milarepa. The Bön practitioners who had met Milarepa when the man died also developed great faith in Milarepa.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why didn't the dying man's friends and family want to invite Milarepa? (they believed in their Bön religion, and didn't want to believe in Buddhist Dharma)
2. What strange being appeared during the Bön ceremony? (a spirit who looked like the dead man had come back to life)
3. Why did the spirit back away when Shiwa Ö came toward it? (it couldn't stand the compassion of Milarepa that was shining from Shiwa Ö)
4. Why was the man reborn as a bug? (his bad karma, and not enough good qualities)
5. Why wasn't Peta practicing Dharma? (because her friends didn't practice Dharma)
6. As Milarepa taught Peta, what happens to close friends who don't act according to Dharma? (they may become enemies)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Harmful Friends:

"Bad friends make excellent virtues fly away." p. 40.

*"Keep company with an evil brood and you'll develop hatred.
Friends of evil ones say negative things."* p. 458

*"Evil ones are like a poisonous tree;
However much you keep to them, that much you lose."* p. 655.

*"People who criticize others and show off but don't have bodhicitta and compassion
have much purifying to do . . .
Those who don't practice according to the Dharma
May be close friends but later become enemies.
Those who actually are harming their friends may seem beautiful, but they are like demons. . .
Those who don't help and have patience wherever they could,
Though they act like a good friend, have many regrets."* p. 643.

"For conduct, abandon negative friends." p. 669.

*"Toward those who engage in negativity and hypocrisy, you have no shame or heedfulness.
However, I do have this kind of shame."* p. 178.

"If you spend time with noble ones, the [good] qualities develop." p. 451.

Milarepa refers to “practicing Dharma” which usually includes meditation and prayer. He also refers to “behavior in accordance with the Dharma.”

For some of us living in western countries, it may be difficult to find friends who know what Dharma is. But a person can behave in accordance with Dharma even if he doesn’t know the word “Dharma.”

What does that mean, to behave or act “in accordance with Dharma”? Being kind, compassionate, honest, helpful, tolerant, patient, unselfish, and having other good qualities.

Why was Milarepa worried about his sister Peta? She wasn’t practicing Dharma.

Why was she not practicing Dharma? Because her friends didn’t.

They also didn’t behave in accordance with Dharma. They influenced her in a negative way.

Milarepa warned her that they later will become enemies.

Why would they become enemies?

Because people who don’t have many good qualities eventually will let you down.

They may act like a good friend, but they don’t truly care very deeply about you.

They interact with you only as long as it benefits them.

Milarepa also said they may seem beautiful, but they are like demons, harming their friends.

It’s hard to imagine that our friends are like demons, isn’t it? But, if we get into a bad conflict with them, they may seem to act like a demon.

And in any case, they’re harmful to you, a bad influence on you, when you join in with their unkind talk or negative behaviors.

We may think we can avoid those behaviors, but almost everyone, including adults, tends to behave like the people who we spend a lot of time with.

If our friends misbehave, we start to misbehave also.

So, choosing friends is not just a matter of who likes to be with us and who we like to be with. Many of us choose to be friends with people who are funny, entertaining, and charming, and maybe also popular. They are fun to be with.

If they also have many good qualities – behavior in accordance with Dharma – that’s great.

But if you notice that sometimes they are dishonest, talk badly about someone, are disrespectful to someone, make fun of someone, or say something unkind, don’t listen to their parent or teacher, or have some other questionable behavior, think about whether you should continue being their friend.

In any case, don’t let them drag you down to their level of behavior. Instead of following their behavior, be an example of good behavior, ignore them, or go away from them.

It’s important to be strong in what you think is right, to stand up for what is right, and that includes not letting others influence you negatively.

In the story, the man who was dying didn’t want his friends and family to have a bad influence on him. He couldn’t stay away from his family, but he didn’t let them keep him away from the Dharma and his guru.

He “stood up for what is right” - he insisted on following what he knew was right even when all of the others were against him.

ACTIVITY – Matching:

Write by the word in the first column the letter of the definition in the second column:

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|--------------------|--|
| Compassion __ | a. Sister of Milarepa |
| Lovingkindness __ | b. Cause and effect |
| Bodhicitta __ | c. An ancient religion in Tibet |
| Marpa __ | d. Powerful yogi |
| Rechungpa __ | e. Tibetan word meaning guru or teacher |
| Peta __ | f. The guru of Marpa |
| Karma __ | g. Female spirit who tried to frighten Milarepa |
| Bön __ | h. Empathy and wishing to remove others' suffering |
| Lama __ | i. Milarepa's student who chased away the spirit |
| Naropa __ | j. Milarepa's student who went to India |
| Siddha __ | k. The guru of Milarepa |
| Tashi Tseringma __ | l. Actions, words and thoughts so others are happy |
| Shiwa Ö __ | m. Wishing to be enlightened to help all beings |