

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 28 – Arrogance and Disrespect

Rechungpa was one of the most famous students of Milarepa. When Rechungpa was a boy, Milarepa taught him to meditate and was like a father to him. They spent many years together, living a very simple life in caves, without the comforts of a home. When the teacher monks from the college had tried to challenge Milarepa's knowledge of Dharma – and even threw dirt at his face – Rechungpa had become very angry at them. Even after Milarepa had won over the monks and proved his miraculous powers, Rechungpa wasn't satisfied, because Milarepa hadn't won the debate by replying with formal Dharmic speech like the teacher monks used. Rechungpa thought,

“These scholar monks don't believe in miraculous powers. They must be defeated by replying to them with logic and formal Dharma. Or else, they must be defeated by using fierce black magic! Although I received teaching from my guru Milarepa on magic, it probably was just words describing it - he didn't really tell me how to do it. The scholar monks said his miracles were just tricks, and this must be proven wrong! My guru won't do it, so I must. To become a buddha, I know that the instructions of the guru are most important. But, to defeat the scholar monks, I need to go to India and get trained in logic.”

So, he told Milarepa that he wanted to go to India and learn logic. Milarepa responded,



“Rechungpa, we didn't lose the debate. The scholars gave their respect. If you go to India to study logic, you will only be going for worldly reasons. If you stop practicing meditation and train yourself in how to speak with formal words, you might learn something, but you're not going to win every debate, and you won't become a great master over all words and logic.”

He continued, “Even if you have the power to kill others through black magic, you just bring ruin to yourself and others. Because of the black magic I did, I had to go through many extreme difficulties when I was with Marpa.”

But Rechungpa pleaded with him to go to India. Milarepa said, “If you insist on going to India, I am not sending you there to learn logic. Instead, I will send you to get Dharma teachings from our lineage of gurus, from the students of Naropa.”

So Rechungpa went to Nepal and then on the long journey to India, where he met a great guru who taught him the Dharma teaching that Milarepa wanted him to learn. So he did what he

was expected to do. But he also learned logic and studied formal Dharma scriptures. And, he learned some sorcery - supernatural powers - from teachers who were not Buddhists.

When Rechungpa returned from India, Milarepa could see with his special vision that Rechungpa had developed some arrogance – he wasn't humble anymore. And indeed, on his way to meet Milarepa, Rechungpa thought, "In terms of blessings and compassion, Jetsun Milarepa is greater than me, but now I am more educated in scriptures and logic. When he greets me, I wonder if he will also prostrate (bow down to me), when I bow to him."

When they met, Milarepa did not bow to him. Rechungpa was disappointed, but spoke kind greetings anyway.

Milarepa thought, "Did this arrogance of Rechungpa come from some evil done by those non-Buddhists he met? Is it because of the curse of some demon? Whatever the cause, I must use some methods to clear away this problem of arrogance." So he sang a song with these words:

"I have no wish to be well-educated; I have not studied textbooks.
With virtuous activity free of worries, I am happy.
I don't have great pride and I don't show off with my words;
Since I don't debate or have disputes, I am happy. . . .
Without any arrogance or desire for fame,
I don't gossip or slander (speak badly about) others, and so I am happy.
Anyplace is fine – anywhere, I am happy.
I can wear any clothes - with anything, I am happy
Any food is fine – with what I get, I am happy.
At anytime, I am always happy. . . .
Are you free of arrogance and pride?
Is all that you've done for the benefit of others, or do you only do things for your own benefit?"



In response, Rechungpa sang a song about his trip to Nepal and India. In his song, he said that the road was very dangerous, full of serious hazards, so he endured many hardships and sufferings. He told about all the very special teachings he received, and said that the gurus and dakinis were very pleased with him. He said that he got siddhis - supernatural powers – that came easily to him like a rain of flowers. The great teachings were given freely to him, and all his intentions were accomplished, so he had great happiness and joy. But rather than being humble and thankful about such great fortune and blessings, he was bragging and showing off about how special he was. He said,

“This genuine Dharma that I have received, since it came to me because of your activities earlier, please see if it’s suitable for you. And offer me due praise and honor.” And then he handed a book that he had received in India to Milarepa.

Rechungpa expected his guru Milarepa to give him praise and honor! The arrogance of Rechungpa was getting to be too much! In order to cut through Rechungpa’s arrogance, Milarepa sang a song with these words:

“Rechungpa, who I’ve raised since you were a young boy,
Don’t brag about the hardships you went through
Those who don’t notice their own bad thoughts,
That is the way they bring their own downfall. . . .
A Dharma practitioner who can’t (humbly) take his seat
Is the cause of the disappearance of the good teachings. . . .
Son, thinking highly of yourself because you got these important teachings
Means you want your mind to stray into becoming corrupt.
Saying lots about Dharma with empty words
Means you want to put a stop to your good meditation experience.
Bragging so much about what you did
Means you’re not sure about accepting your guru.
A student not having respect for his guru -
there is no greater regret than that. . . .
My handsome son called Rechungpa,
If this is reasonable, then keep it in your heart.
If it’s not reasonable, then do as you please. . . .
Since you’re young and you think so well of yourself,
You will criticize (me) in return, (because I am) the one who tells you
That you are prideful, have bad manners, and speak in a bad way.”

Milarepa picked up Rechungpa’s book, and walked away. Then, using his yogic power of running at a miraculously fast speed, he ran. Rechungpa ran as fast as he could to try to keep up with him, but got very tired and couldn’t easily keep up. But, although he was out of breath, he managed to sing a song to Milarepa while running, with these words:

“Father, Jetsun Guru, kindly listen. . . .
All these teachings I brought, this pure speech, I offer to you, the father Jetsun.
I offer them to return the kindness of the guru.
They are wonderful indeed, please accept them.
And look upon this weary Rechungpa,
Think of me with love, and stop awhile.
If you were to allow me to rest, it would be a most supreme generosity.”

Milarepa listened to the song as he ran, and at the end of the song, he sat down and sang a song in reply, that included these words:

“By pleasing your guru, blessings will come.
By thinking of yourself humbly, it is of good benefit to you.
A Dharma practitioner is one who gives up his bad attitude.
If you respect someone’s criticism of you, that is loving-kindness.
If you stay humble, you will become popular. . . .
If you have great bodhicitta, excellence comes. . . .
I have more concerns than you about the things that you do.
Son, don’t be bound by arrogantly hoping to become famous.
Go and meditate alone.”

Then Milarepa slowed down, and he and Rechungpa walked together. As they walked, Rechungpa thought,

“If it had been another guru, on my return from India, I would have received a cheerful and warm welcome. But since my guru lives in such harsh conditions and poor clothing as he does, how could I expect a warm welcome from him? I spent time in India and learned all of these special teachings. Reaching enlightenment by living in such harsh conditions like Milarepa, having nothing, is not for me. I should be able to meditate and practice while having at least some comfortable things, like the teachers in India.”

He was having negative thoughts and views about Milarepa. But Milarepa was aware of his thoughts.



Along the path, there was a yak’s horn lying on the ground, and Milarepa said, “Rechungpa, pick up that yak’s horn and bring it along.”

Rechungpa thought, “My guru sometimes says completely useless things! Sometimes he gets

angry like an old dog, and sometimes he has some desire like an old man. What use is this yak’s horn?”

He said to Milarepa, “it’s useless for eating, and it’s useless for drinking. We should just leave it.”

Milarepa responded, "It's not difficult to carry, it won't bother us, and there will come a time when it will be useful." Then he picked it up himself.

They were walking a huge flat area, where there were no trees nearby. The sky had been clear



and blue, with no clouds, but dark clouds began to appear in the sky. Then a strong wind blew, which became fierce, and the sky became very dark with thick clouds. Suddenly, hail began to fall from the sky. Rechungpa had to protect his head from the big hailstones pounding down from the sky. Bending his head down and quickly covering it, he sat down to protect himself from the hail pouring from the sky. So he didn't think to look at his guru.

When the hail slowed down a bit, Rechungpa looked for his guru. He stood up and looked around, but he couldn't find him! Where could Milarepa be? There were no trees, large rocks or hills that his guru could be behind. Now what should he do? Just stand there in the middle of nowhere without his guru? He sat down again and waited, hoping his guru would somehow appear. Then, suddenly, Rechungpa heard a voice. It sounded like his guru, but he couldn't see Milarepa anywhere around.

He noticed the yak horn lying on the ground. Milarepa's voice was coming from the direction of the yak's horn. Rechungpa walked over to it and thought, "This is the same horn that the Jetsun was holding before." He tried to pick it up. But it was so heavy, he couldn't move it at all. It was stuck to the ground. Rechungpa bent down to the ground and peeked inside the open end of the horn.



He could see Milarepa sitting right within the open end of the yak's horn, but it had not gotten any bigger, and amazingly, Milarepa had not gotten any smaller! How could it be that his full-size guru could be sitting in that small yak's horn? It was like looking in a small mirror, knowing that what you see is full size, but appears small in the mirror.

Milarepa then sang a song as he sat in the horn, with these words:
“To have the wise view and awareness, have devotion and respect, Rechungpa!
My son Rechungpa’s view is like a vulture, the king of birds:
Sometimes it’s high and sometimes it’s low.
Between high and low, stop and think!
Don’t be so much in a hurry, my helper who wears only one cloth like me!
If you my son think you are equal to me your father, then come inside this yak’s horn.
It’s like a comfortable house in here - there’s plenty of space!
Son, Rechungpa, your body is young,
You’ve gone to India and served many scholars and siddhas (powerful holy men).
You’ve become important, so step inside this wide-open space
inside this yak’s horn where it’s dry.”

Rechungpa thought, “Will I be able to fit inside?”

He tried to enter the horn, but not even his head or hand would fit. He thought, “Jetsun’s power may be real, or it might not be. But I do know the hail was real.”

He knew Milarepa could make hail fall from the sky. But how could he make his body fit inside the small horn? Then, trembling as tears rolled down his cheeks, he put his mouth up to the horn and sang:

“Father Guru, Jetsun, please listen:
This servant - me, Rechung Dorje Drak - of our lineage of gurus,
My view, meditation and behavior is not high or low, . . . good or bad: they are in the right place. . . . Whether I am as good as you or not, I humbly beg you to come to me!”

Then Milarepa came out from the yak’s horn and gazed at the sky. The wind calmed, the clouds went away, and the warm sun came out and started to dry Rechungpa’s wet clothes.

Rechungpa said, “Lama, now I’m hungry and cold. Please let’s go over to that tent there and beg for food.”

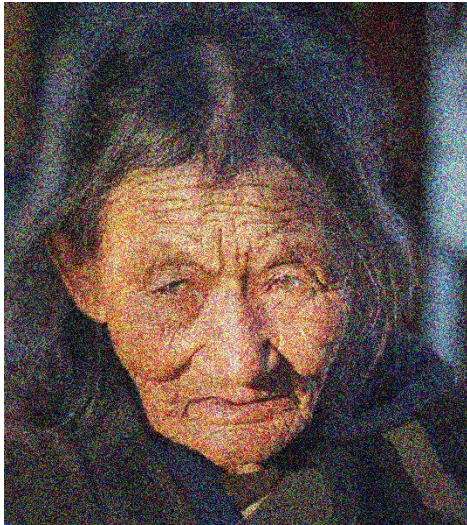
Milarepa responded, “Now is not the time for begging for food.”

Rechungpa said, “I’m starving right now. Please, we must go over there.”

“Okay, very well, we’ll go ahead,” Milarepa said. “In the first big tent there, there are two or three people with whom we may have a good connection. We can go up there to beg first.”

Rechungpa thought those in the big tents would be wealthy and arrogant. He said, “They beat people who beg for food. Don’t be too eager for the big tents. The people in the smaller tents won’t yell at us. We should go over here to the smaller tents in the camp first.”

They went to the door of the small yellow tent and announced that they were asking for food.



An old woman came to the door of the tent, scowling with disgust, "It's probably easy for you yogis to come begging here day and night, but it's difficult for us. It's not okay for you to come saying you want something to eat. We need food, too. I've already given what I had to other beggars this morning, so I have nothing. Go beg from someone else!"

Milarepa said to Rechungpa, "In the evening there is nothing we can get to eat. Since the sun is about to set, we should go somewhere to sleep." They found a place to sleep on the other side of the camp. But in the middle of the night, they heard loud noises from the tents that went on for a long time.

Just before the sun rose, all was quiet. Milarepa said, "Rechungpa, look at the tents."

Rechungpa looked and somehow he knew that the old lady wasn't there. He replied, "That old lady last night who wouldn't give us food isn't there at all."

Milarepa said, "Well, let's go over there. There are things to eat and things to do."

They went over to the tents, where they saw that the old woman had died, because she had spoken harshly to a holy man, Milarepa. There was a small bag of soft butter and tsampa and a bucket full of yogurt.

Milarepa said, "Son, Rechungpa, all things are like this. Last night we felt we missed out, not getting any of this food. Today, it has been left behind for us both. I'd like some food. Hand me some."

They made offerings with the food and the dead woman's belongings, then packed the food left over for themselves to eat later. Milarepa explained,

"Rechungpa, it's not good to take food from a corpse (dead body) without doing something that helps the person who died. So, you carry the corpse, and I will lead."

While Milarepa led the way to find a proper place to put the body, away from where people would be, Rechungpa carried the old woman's corpse. But he carelessly stepped on Milarepa's shadow, which was a disrespectful thing to do in the Tibetan culture. Milarepa showed Rechungpa where to put the corpse and place it in a respectful way, and sang a song that included these words:

“This scarecrow of a body that we have, that longs for pleasant things,
Everything done to please it is the cause for suffering.
Our body is just a bag of filth, so don't think so highly of yourself! . . .
Inside the body, the life-force is as fragile as a horsehair;
It is uncertain, about to break, just like the life-force of this old woman last night.”

Later on, Rechungpa had a very joyful experience in meditation. When Milarepa asked him about it, he described how it was so delightful for him. Milarepa cautioned him,

“If these experiences aren't flawed with pride and arrogance, then you have understood the guru's kindness. (To avoid developing pride and arrogance about your abilities), you must have the view that those experiences are a result of the guru's kindness. However, it seems you don't have it. This yogi (I, Milarepa) has completed all that is to be done. Son, do you have anything like this? Don't have such great pride, Rechungpa!”

Milarepa suggested, “Now, let us, father and son, go to meditate in an empty land with no people, such as Lapchi or Tise.”

Rechungpa replied, “My body is tired. If I can't go to a temple in a nearby village to stay and be refreshed, I won't be able to travel and meditate.” Perhaps he was remembering the comforts of staying in village temples in India.

Milarepa answered, “If you are really practicing Dharma with your whole heart, then doing what I have suggested is good enough for us. . . . If you want to do it right, then do it like this. If you don't, then you will go down the wrong path. . . . Though my advice would be helpful, I know you won't pay any attention to it. To one who is self-centered (always thinking of what he wants), speaking directly and honestly is just a waste of time. If you are willing to meditate, then come and follow me. If not, then you can just do what you want.”

Milarepa got up to get ready to leave. Then Rechungpa grabbed Milarepa by his clothes, and said, “I must have a bed with a roof overhead or else rain, wind and enemies will harm me. This is one thing about your way that's not sufficient for me. . . . Without books to make things clear, there's nothing I can do - that's another thing that's not sufficient. The body must have food, and that's another thing. And the body must have proper clothes, that's another thing. One needs friends wherever one goes - whether good or bad, everyone has friends - so that's another thing. Evil beings and hostile enemies could arise anywhere especially when we're alone, and that's another thing. I know, when you stay with the guru and get along well, then whatever he does will be pleasant. But please, come to where I wish to go. I ask you, please come to the town for a while.”

Milarepa, out of compassion, said, “If you absolutely will not go into the mountains where there are no other people, then let's go for a while to Poto village to teach the Dharma to the people.” So they went to the village.

QUESTIONS:

1. What was Rechungpa's attitude when he came back from India? (arrogant)
2. What did he get in India that was special, that made him feel so arrogant? (education, special teachings, and supernatural powers)
3. Why do you think Milarepa showed his powers of running so fast and appearing inside the yak's horn, and then asked Rechungpa to come inside it? (so Rechungpa would realize he was not so powerful and to respect his guru)
4. Did Rechungpa always obey his guru? (no)
5. How did the old lady in the tent act toward Milarepa and Rechungpa? (arrogant, disrespectful)
6. Why didn't Rechungpa want to stay alone in the mountains with Milarepa? (it's uncomfortable – no comfortable place to stay, food, clothes, and friends)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Arrogance and Disrespect

*"I don't have great pride and I don't show off with my words;
Since I don't debate or have disputes, I am happy. . . .
"Without any arrogance or desire for fame,
I don't gossip or slander (speak badly about) others, and so I am happy.
Anyplace is fine – anywhere, I am happy.
I can wear any clothes - with anything, I am happy
Any food is fine – with what I get, I am happy.
At anytime, I am always happy. . . .
Are you free of arrogance and pride?"*

*"Those who don't notice their bad thoughts
That is the way they bring their own downfall."*

*"By thinking of yourself humbly, it is of good benefit to you.
A dharma practitioner is one who gives up his bad attitude.
If you respect someone's criticism of you, that is loving-kindness.
If you stay humble, you will become popular. . . .
If you have great bodhicitta, excellence comes."
"To have the wise view and awareness, have devotion and respect, Rechungpa!"*

"My son Rechungpa's view is like a vulture, the king of birds: Sometimes it's high and sometimes it's low. Between high and low, stop and think!"

“By falsely boasting of your greatness, you’ll gather bad karma.”

“If you don’t know the mind-streams of others, do not criticize others or their views; there’s a danger you’ll fall into arrogance.”

- Milarepa

Rechungpa became a very great yogi, one of the two most famous students of Milarepa. But as we see in this story, he had some problems when he was young with being too arrogant, and even being disrespectful to his teacher.

Let’s review Rechungpa’s arrogant behaviors, as pointed out by Milarepa in the story.

After he traveled all the way to India and met great teachers, what did he do?

He was bragging and showing off. He thought he was better than everyone else.

He expected to be praised and honored for his achievements.

How did Rechungpa behave toward Milarepa giving him advice?

He ignored his teacher’s advice, and insisted on doing what he wanted to do rather than what Milarepa advised him to do. He thought about his own comforts rather than what is important.

What did Milarepa point out that Rechungpa did when someone points out his mistakes?

He criticizes them in return.

What was Rechungpa focused on, himself or others?

Himself. He focused only on what he wanted to do rather than what might be good for others.

And he didn’t care much about others, as when he carelessly stepped on Milarepa’s shadow.

Rechungpa was so focused on himself, but did he notice his own bad thoughts?

No. He didn’t seem to notice that he was having bad thoughts.

What about the old woman in the story, how was she arrogant?

She wouldn’t share her food -- she didn’t care about Milarepa and Rechungpa.

She thought that since she already gave some food away earlier, that was enough generosity.

Can you think of some examples of other arrogant behaviors in people you have observed?

Always trying to be first, or the center of attention, and not giving others a chance.

Being rude, insulting others, putting others down, talking bad about them, being disrespectful.

Not respecting others’ opinions.

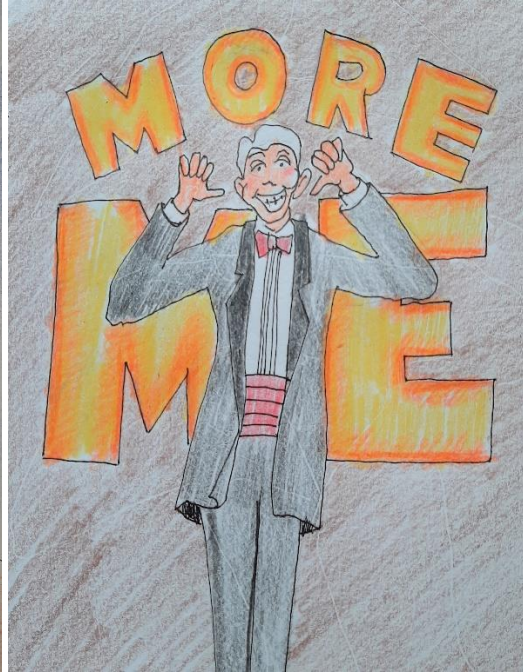
Acting entitled, expecting to get whatever they want, insisting on doing whatever they want.

Demanding, bossy, controlling, intolerant.

Very competitive, always expecting to be the winner, being angry if they don’t win.

Often complaining, disagreeing, or arguing until they get their way.

Becoming angry if criticized.



So, how would you describe an arrogant person in just a few words?

Someone who acts like he is better, more special, or more important than others, and not caring much about them.

But, don't we all like to feel special and important? Shouldn't we feel confident in ourselves? Isn't it okay to feel proud of our accomplishments?

Yes. Confidence is a good thing! We need to feel good about ourselves and our accomplishments to have a healthy self-esteem.

So, what's the difference between confidence, or a healthy self-esteem, and arrogance?

One of the main differences is that an arrogant person doesn't think much about what others want or need, but a confident person cares about others.

Also, arrogant people are putting on an act of being better than others.

They put on this act usually because they have insecurities, doubts about whether they are worthy. Even if they have great talent, skill, or achievements, they always need to make themselves seem important and to get reactions from others to feel worthy, to feel good enough, or to make sure others don't find their weak points.

They compare what they have with what others have to prove they are superior, that they have the best.

Milarepa pointed this out in his song, when he mentioned that Rechungpa's view is like a vulture, sometimes high and sometimes low.

Sometimes Rechungpa had a high view of himself – like he's the best -- and sometimes he had a low view of himself, worried that he isn't important and admired enough.

On the other hand, having self-esteem, or confidence, means knowing that we are good and worthy so we don't have to put on an act or prove anything to others.

We are good and worthy because like everyone else, we have the Buddha nature -- all the good qualities of the Buddha. We know this from what the Buddha has taught us, and because we have good qualities -- our kindness, compassion, generosity, patience, tolerance and so on. Of course we aren't perfect, but we do have these qualities.

But if we don't know this, or when we forget, then we might feel the need for others to admire us, tell us how great we are, or treat us like we are special and more important than others. These are normal feelings. But if we are not careful, these feelings can lead to arrogance.

So, to avoid being arrogant, remember your Buddha Nature – you are good, you don't have to prove anything to others.

And, remember to be humble, the opposite of arrogant; remember that no matter how wonderful we are, we have faults and weaknesses too.

In fact, Milarepa said that if you stay humble, you will become popular. Arrogant people may win others' respect at first, but after some time, most people find them annoying.

So, being humble, we don't look down on others – we don't think of them as less important, worthy or intelligent. Be aware of whether you are treating someone as less important, showing off, or talking badly about someone. Everyone equally has the Buddha Nature, and everyone has their own talents and skills that you may not know about.

And, respect the opinions and views of others, even if you don't agree with them, as long as they are not harming anyone.

Also, as Milarepa taught, respect others' criticism of you. If what they say is true, then it helps you see and overcome your mistake. If it is not true, then ignore it.

Like Milarepa, happy with whatever he gets, be content with what you have rather than being like a spoiled person, dissatisfied and complaining.

ACTIVITY – Make an Arrogance Monster:



Make an Arrogance Monster the same way as the Jealousy Monster, only with eyes and mouth that has an arrogant expression. See the example below. Notice that the monster is made out of trash – repurposed cardboard and newspaper or magazines that would have been thrown in the trash. By making a toy out of trash, we are having respect for the environment.