

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 8 – Unworthiness and Depression

Milarepa stayed in the cave near Lama Ngokpa, meditating to forget his fear. He was afraid of what would happen when Marpa found out that he left without permission to get teachings from another lama, taking the jewels of Naropa that were stolen from Marpa's room.

Lama Ngokpa sent a man to find out about the ceremony for Marpa to dedicate the tower to his son. When the man returned, he went to Milarepa who was meditating in his cave, and said through the small opening, "the ceremony for the consecration of the tower and the coming of age of Marpa's son have been discussed in detail."

Milarepa, worried about what Marpa was thinking, asked in response, "Did they speak of me?"

The man replied, "Marpa's wife asked what you were doing. I told her you were in strict seclusion, meditating in a cave. She asked me what else you were doing besides that. I replied that you were living in a deserted place. She then said, 'Maybe he missed this which he left here. When he was with us he used to be very fond of it. Give it to him.' This is what she gave me."



He loosened his belt and took out a small clay cube and handed it to Milarepa, who touched it to his forehead in deep reverence, for it had come from the dear hand of the lama's wife, Dakmema.

The man went away. Milarepa was in a mood to play with the cube, which was for playing dice. It was marked with a number from one to six in small dots on each side, like dice in today's world. He flipped it and before it fell, he tried to guess what number would be on the top when it landed. He flipped it a few times.

Then he thought about what Dakmema had said to the man about the dice, and was confused. Why would she think he was fond of dice and missed it? He thought,

"When I was with Marpa's wife I never played dice. Maybe she doesn't have much affection for me anymore. It was because my ancestors played dice that they were forced to leave their homeland."

What did she really think of him? He became disgusted and threw the cube hard, swinging it above his head so it would land hard on the ground. It broke as it fell, and he noticed a flash of something light-colored that dropped out of it. He picked it up. It was a roll of paper that said,

“Now the lama will initiate you and give you the teaching. Return with Lama Ngokpa.”

Milarepa danced up in the air in joy! Finally, after all this, the lama would give him the precious teachings! He leaped from one side of the cave to the other.

Later, Lama Ngokpa came to Milarepa’s cave and said, “Good Great Magician, come out and prepare to leave.”

Milarepa obeyed. Lama Ngokpa loaded up all of his own collection of religious paintings and statues, scriptures, and stupas, along with all his gold and turquoise, silks and robes, and all the household utensils – pots, pans, cups, knives and spoons. He left behind only the items that Marpa had given him. He gathered all his farm animals from the stable and the meadow to bring to Marpa.

But there was one old goat that had a broken leg and wouldn’t be able to follow the herd.



He told Milarepa to leave that goat behind.

When they were all ready to leave, he said to Milarepa, “Since you have been helpful to me, take this silk and this turquoise as an offering to Lama Marpa.” His wife also gave Milarepa a bag of cheese to offer to

Dakmema. The lama, his wife, Milarepa, and the lama’s servants all traveled together to the valley where Marpa lived. When they arrived in the valley, Lama Ngokpa said,

“Great Magician, go ahead of us and tell Marpa’s wife that we are coming. See if she will send some beer.”

So Milarepa went ahead of them and then greeted Dakmema, offering her the bag of cheese. He said to her,

“Lama Ngokpa is coming. Please bring some beer to welcome him.”

Joyfully, she responded, “The lama is in his room. Go and ask him yourself.”

Milarepa went to Marpa, who was on his terrace, doing his prayers with his face turned toward the east. Milarepa prostrated and offered him the silk and turquoise. Marpa turned his head

away and looked toward the west. Milarepa went to that side and prostrated again. Marpa looked toward the south.

“Oh Master,” Milarepa cried, “It is right that as punishment you reject my offerings. But Lama Ngokpa is arriving with his collection of religious paintings and statues, stupas, gold, turquoise, horses, dzos (hybrids of a yak and cow), and all his wealth. He only hopes that someone is going to receive him with a little beer. That is why I am asking for it from you.”

Bursting with anger, snapping his fingers, the lama shouted in a terrible voice,

“From three collections of sacred books in India I gathered the essence of the Four Tantras. When I brought back the teaching, no one came to greet me, not even a little bird. And because Ngokpa is arriving, pushing a few mangy beasts in front of him, he wishes that I, the Great Translator, should go to meet him. I shall not go – and now get out!”

Milarepa went to tell this to Dakmema. She said,

“The lama answered in anger. Ngokpa is a great man and should be met. Let us both go, mother and son.”

Milarepa answered, “Lama Ngokpa and his wife don’t expect anyone to go and meet them. They have asked for something to drink so I will go alone and carry it.”

But Dakmema went with Milarepa, along with some students carrying the beer, to greet them.

Meanwhile, many people had gathered for the big ceremony and Marpa chanted praises of gratitude and blessing. When the chanting was finished, Lama Ngokpa offered Marpa the gifts, saying,



“Lama Rinpoche, since you are already the Master of my whole being - body, speech and mind- I now offer all my worldly goods, except for one old goat, the mother of all my other goats, who couldn’t come because of her broken leg, so I left her behind. Please grant us initiation and the profound instruction and secret teachings written on the scrolls.” And he prostrated to the great lama.

Marpa appeared joyful, and said, “But even so, my initiation and profound instructions are the shortest path which leads to Enlightenment in this life. The instructions written on the scrolls are kept by me under safeguards according to the strict commands of my own lama and the dakinis. That is why it will be difficult for these instructions to be given to you if you don’t offer me the old

goat, in spite of her old age and broken leg. As to the other teachings, I have already taught all of them to you.”

Everyone around burst into laughter, and Ngokpa replied, “If the goat is brought here and I offer it to you, will you reveal the secret teaching to me?”

Marpa answered, “If you bring the goat yourself, and offer it to me, you may have the teaching.”

So the next day, Ngokpa went alone back to his house, and carried the goat on his back, because it couldn’t walk. Then he offered it to Marpa, who cried out joyfully,

“You are an initiated student who is worthy to be called faithful to the bond with his lama. I have no need of this goat. I only wanted to stress the importance of the teaching that I am giving you.” Marpa gave Ngokpa initiation and instruction as promised.

Monks who had come from far-away places arranged a feast for the ceremony. Next to his seat, Marpa had a long stick. He looked at Ngokpa with narrowed eyes, pointed his finger at Ngokpa, and asked,

“Why have you given initiation and instruction on this wicked man called Good News?”

Marpa glanced toward his stick. Ngokpa was afraid and, prostrating, answered, “Lama Rinpoche, you yourself wrote to me to initiate and instruct Great Magician, and you gave me the jewels of Naropa and his ruby mala. So, I carried out your order. I have no reason to blame myself, and so I don’t feel shame or remorse.”



Ngokpa fearfully raised his eyes to Marpa. Furiously, Marpa pointed his finger at Milarepa and asked him,

“Where did you get these objects?”

Milarepa’s heart was in agony, as if it had been torn out of his chest. He was silent with terror. Then, in a trembling voice, he confessed that Marpa’s wife had given them to him.

The lama jumped up, grabbed the stick, and went out to beat his wife. Dakmema had been listening attentively but now she hopped up and ran away. She ran to the temple and locked herself inside.

Marpa shook the door, and then returned and sat down. He said to Ngokpa, "You acted without my permission. Go this moment and get the jewels of Naropa and his ruby mala."

Then Marpa covered his head with his cloak and remained motionless. Ngokpa prostrated and immediately left to fetch the jewels and ruby rosary.

Milarepa wished he had run with Dakmema to the temple. He went out of the room where Marpa was sitting. He felt like crying, and as he tried to hold back his tears, Ngokpa saw him.

Milarepa said to him, "Can I go with you as a servant?"

Ngokpa replied, "If I take you away without the lama's permission, it will always be the same thing as today. Since he is angry with us both, stay here for awhile. If he later sends you away without having accepted you as a student, then I will have full power to help you."



Milarepa, trembling, said tearfully in a choking voice, "Well then since Marpa's wife and you are both in trouble because of my sins, and since with this body I will not receive the Dharma but will only accumulate more sins, I am going to kill myself. May I be reborn with a body worthy of the Dharma!"

As he was about to kill himself, Ngokpa held him firmly, and with tears in his eyes, tenderly said to him,

"Worthy Great Magician, don't do that! According to the most secret teachings of the Buddha, the body and the five senses of each of us are divine. If you die before your

time, you commit the sin of killing a god. That is why suicide is such a terrible crime. Even in the well-known teachings of the Buddha, there is no greater sin than to cut off one's own life. Since you know this, give up the idea of killing yourself. It is still possible that the lama will give you the teaching. But if he does not, another lama surely will."

While he was speaking to Milarepa, some of the other monks, hearing these words, couldn't bear Milarepa's misfortune, and went up to Marpa to see if the moment had come to plead for Milarepa. Other monks went up to comfort Milarepa.

In spite of the kind, loving lama and monks trying to help him, Milarepa, filled with anguish, thought,

“Is my heart made of iron? It must be, because if it weren’t, then it would have burst and I would be dead.”

It is because of the crimes committed when he was younger that he endured such suffering while seeking the Dharma. At this moment there was no one there who was not sobbing tearfully. Some of them were so overcome with compassion and grief for Milarepa that they fainted.

Many of the monks went back and forth between comforting Milarepa and wanting to plead with Marpa.

Finally the lama broke his silence. His mind was now calmed down, and he asked for his wife to come. He asked her where Ngokpa and the other monks had gone.

She answered, “In accordance with your order to bring back the jewels of Naropa and his ruby mala, Lama Ngokpa immediately went out to fetch them, and has now returned.” She told him how Great Magician was begging Lama Ngokpa to help him and how Ngokpa was consoling him.



Tears came from Marpa’s eyes, and he said, “Students of the secret path must be like them, indeed, they are so. I have compassion for them. Bring all my students.

A monk who was sent to invite Ngokpa said, “Now the lama is calm. He sent me to ask you to come.”

Milarepa exclaimed, “Happy are those with good karma! As for me, a sinner, even though the lama is calm, I will not have the good fortune to see him. If I went, he would only curse me and beat me.”

Weeping, Milarepa stayed where he was. Ngokpa, who stayed with him, said to the monk,

“Go and tell the lama how it is with Great Magician. Ask if he should come before him. If I don’t remain near him now, I fear this man may do something terrible.”

The monk told Marpa what Milarepa and Ngokpa had said. Marpa replied,

“In the past, he would have been right. But today, I shall not do the same as before. Great Magician is to be the chief guest. Let Dakmema go and fetch him!”

The lama’s wife, both smiling and fearful, said to Milarepa,

“Brother Great Magician, the lama now appears to be taking you as a student. He seems to be deeply moved by compassion. He said that you are the chief guest, and has sent me to fetch you. He hasn’t said any harsh words to me. Let’s be happy and go.”

Milarepa wondered if it were true, and filled with fear, he went in. Then Marpa spoke:

“If everything is carefully examined, not one of us is to be blamed. I have merely tested Great Magician to purify him of his sins. If the work on the tower had been intended for my own pleasure, I would have been gentle in giving orders. Therefore, I was sincere.

“Being a woman, my wife was also right not to be able to bear the situation, yet her excessive compassion in deceiving, being dishonest with the sacred jewels and the forged letter was, seriously, going too far.

“Ngokpa, you were right in the matter that you told me. However, go now and bring me those sacred jewels and afterward I will give them to you.

“Great Magician was burning with desire for the Dharma, and he was right to use any way to get it.

“Ngokpa didn’t know that my wife had sent Milarepa by dishonesty. This is why he gave Great Magician initiation and instruction. So, I shall not look for a way to punish him.

“Although I had a flood of anger, it was not like worldly anger. However my actions may appear, they always come from considering the Dharma and are, in essence, according to the Path of Enlightenment. As for the rest of you who are not yet fully taught in the Dharma, don’t let your faith be shaken.

“If this son of mine, Great Magician, had completed nine great difficulties, he would have gotten his complete Enlightenment, without any future rebirths. Due to Dakmema’s weakness, that did not happen, so there will remain a faint stain of impurity with him. However, his great sins have been erased by his eight great difficulties and by his many small agonies.”

He said to Milarepa, “Now, I receive you and will give you my teaching, which is as dear to me as my own heart. I will help you with whatever you need and let you meditate and be happy.”

As he was saying these words, Milarepa wondered, “Is this a dream, or am I really awake? If it’s a dream, I wish never to wake up.”

At this thought, his happiness was boundless. Crying tears of joy, he prostrated to his lama, Marpa. Dakmema, Ngokpa, and the others thought,

“What skillful ways and power the lama has when he wants to accept a student! The lama himself is a living Buddha.” And their faith in him grew more. Out of their love for Milarepa,, they all cheerfully prostrated before Lama Marpa.

QUESTIONS:

1. When the man returned from Marpa’s house, what little object did he bring to Milarepa from Dakmema? (clay cube, dice)
2. What was inside it? (a message to return with Lama Ngokpa to Marpa, that he would give him the teachings)
3. What did Lama Ngokpa bring as offerings to Marpa? (everything he owned except an old goat with a broken leg)
4. What did Lama Ngokpa have to bring to Marpa before he could receive the secret teachings? (the old goat with a broken leg)
5. Why did Marpa make him bring the old goat? (to show him how important the teachings are)
6. Milarepa was so depressed and wanted to kill himself, because he had gotten which two persons into trouble? (Dakmema and Ngokpa)
7. Why did Marpa put Milarepa through so much agony? (to purify his sins, his bad karmas)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – UNWORTHINESS AND DEPRESSION:

*“In the solitary cave, in the wilderness, the recluse knows much loneliness.
But my faithful heart never separates from the Lama-Buddha of the Three Ages.
By the force of meditation arising from my efforts, without doubt I will achieve self-realization.
And when one has attained deeper experience an illumination,
Happiness comes of itself in this life.
And Enlightenment in the next,
That is why I ask my sister Peta,
Instead of being overcome with frustration and sorrow,
To strive with perseverance toward the Dharma.”*

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa p. 125)

Milarepa was extremely frustrated after trying for so long, and working so hard, enduring so much pain and abuse to his body and his mind, to please his guru and receive the teachings.

He thought that he wasn't getting the teachings because he wasn't worthy of receiving the Dharma. He felt that he wasn't good enough.

All of us have felt at some points in our lives that we weren't good enough.

For example, we have all experienced that someone else did better much than we did.

We've all had the experience of not getting something we really wanted, when others got it.

Like Milarepa didn't get the teachings, but all the other students did, even though he worked so long and hard and they didn't.

At times, we've felt ignored, that others don't care about us.

Or that we're not important. Or that others don't want to listen to what we have to say.

Maybe we've been bullied, ridiculed, or humiliated.

Maybe we've felt that we don't look good enough.

Or that there is something about us that we feel embarrassed about.

Or that others don't understand us, the way we are.

Or that if we don't perform at our best all the time, then someone will think we're not good enough.

When those feelings come up very often - every day - over time, then we can start to feel that we are unworthy. That we really are not good enough. That we don't matter to others.

Or that no one really cares about us, the way we are.

That can lead to symptoms of depression and even suicide, like Milarepa.

These symptoms are not very unusual in today's world!

Even very famous actors, actresses, sports stars, and musicians have had these symptoms.

Some of them used alcohol or drugs to try to get rid of the symptoms, and some of them died from it. And some of them committed suicide.

Many of them felt that others only cared about them because of their money, beauty or fame, and didn't really care about them for the person they really are.

If we are often comparing ourselves with others, and being disappointed in ourselves, then we can begin to hate ourselves, feel we are a failure, hopeless, or always making mistakes. This can lead to self-destructive behavior.

A common reason for feelings of unworthiness is that we feel we are being judged.

We feel we must conform to a certain standard, we are expected to be a certain way.

Others are judging us, and we are judging others and ourselves.

If we often judge others, thinking of others' flaws, weaknesses, bad behaviors and mistakes, then we get into a habit of being judgmental and critical, full of negative thoughts.

This is negative karma – our negative thoughts or words about others leads to others having negative thoughts or words about us, sooner or later.

We all want to be loved and cared about for the person we truly are, and not be criticized.

The problem is, we think that the person we truly are is the person we see in the mirror, or the personality we try to be – funny, intelligent, popular, or whatever.

But those are only temporary appearances!

We're changing all the time – we grow older, we look different, our personality and interests change, what we think is important changes, we make mistakes, we learn new things, we have different aspects of our personality arise and disappear.

Who we really are – and who doesn't change, and is always happy and perfect - is the Buddha Nature.

The Buddha Nature is the part of us that we can experience if we meditate and practice Dharma, especially the Four Immeasurables – Lovingkindness, Compassion, Joy for others, and Equanimity (not being affected by ups and downs, reducing our likes and dislikes).

The more we identify with the Buddha Nature, the more peaceful and confident we become, and the better our appearance, behavior and performance becomes.

How can we do that? Forget about what happened in the past, what happened moments ago, or what might happen in the future. Focus on connecting with the Buddha Nature right now, this moment. You can do that by chanting a mantra, meditating, looking at a statue of Buddha or a deity, taking mindful breaths, walking mindfully, wishing that others be happy, wishing that others not be as unhappy as you are, or doing something helpful to your parents or other family member.

ACTIVITY – Nature Walk:

Take a slow, mindful walk in Nature and notice the beauty of trees, leaves, flowers, a stream, stones, moss, plants, insects, birds, any wildlife you see. Meditate on wishing all wildlife and all beings around you be peaceful, safe, healthy and happy. Contemplate that the meditation shows that you have the Buddha Nature in you.

Notice whether you are relaxed, and whether you have a good mood after the walk.