

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 31 – Being Considerate

Rechungpa had gained so much knowledge that he was respected as a great master, similar to Milarepa. Their students compared the old master Milarepa with the young master Rechungpa. One student said,

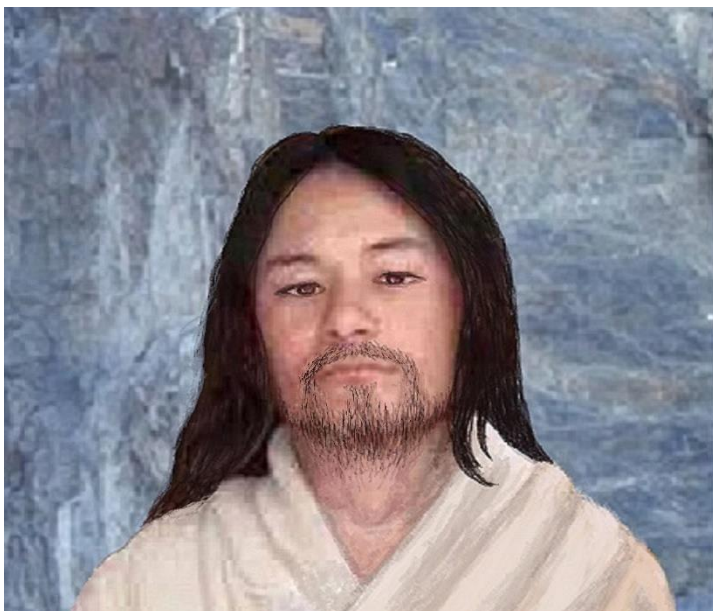
“The son, Rechungpa, is better than the father, Milarepa, because Rechungpa has gone to India to study.” The younger students agreed, so they wanted to learn from Rechungpa, while the older students preferred to be with Milarepa. One day, the students came to make offerings to both Milarepa and Rechungpa. They were full of devotion to Rechungpa, and gave him many excellent offerings. But when they went over to Milarepa, they made only a few small measly offerings to him.

Rechungpa, not having seen the offerings made to Milarepa, thought, “If I’ve received this much, then the Jetsun Milarepa has certainly received even greater offerings.”

He went to Milarepa and said, “Jetsun, have you received excellent offerings today? Between the offerings received by us both, master and disciple, it would be good if we have a ganachakra feast for all of the students.”

“Okay that’s fine,” Milarepa said, “my share is over there under that slab of stone. Go ahead and take it.”

Rechungpa went over to the stone and saw that there was only one piece of rotting meat, a container of sour beer, and one serving of tsampa. Rechungpa returned to his cave and thought,



“Is this how these students act? The guru is like a Buddha, and I can’t be as good as even one tiny piece of skin on his body. That kind of service they do is no good. I have stayed near the guru, and I’m completely satisfied by all of the instructions I have received and by all my service to him. I’ve done what I needed to do staying with my guru. Now, if I stay around, I won’t be of any service to him, and in addition, I’ll be an embarrassment, because now the students want to be with me instead of with him. I will ask his permission to leave.”

Rechungpa had a strong wish to go to Central Tibet. Rising early in the morning, he went to see Milarepa. In the cave, there was Milarepa, lying down, rubbing his head. Why wasn't he sitting up and meditating? Was he being lazy? Another student was there. Rechungpa thought, "My guru is enlightened, but sometimes he acts in ways that seem strange to others."

Knowing what Rechungpa was thinking, Milarepa sang a song with these words,

"Son, Rechungpa, now please listen.
I, your old father, Milarepa, sometimes when I sleep, I meditate.
I meditate while I'm lying down.
My ignorance is gone.
If everyone's ignorance was gone, I would be very pleased."

Rechungpa asked Milarepa for permission to go to Central Tibet, and he gave many reasons for going. He said he wanted to see the place where Marpa lived, and several holy places.



Milarepa replied, "Son, although there are people for you to guide in Central Tibet, the time has not come for you to go. Do not go against what your guru says. Are you just saying this now, or have you had it in your mind for some time?"

He advised further, "Don't be distracted. When you can be in the mountains, why wander around the countryside? When you meditate on the guru as Buddha, and meditate with the instructions of our lineage, why go to holy places? Aren't you worried that being around many people, you might get caught up in their ways and damage the wisdom and purity that you have?"

Rechungpa said, "If I stay around with you, Jetsun, I won't be of service to you; I'll only be an embarrassment. So I ask you to let me travel the country and share my wisdom with others. If I don't go then I can't share what I've learned with others." He pleaded for permission to go.

Milarepa responded, "Rechungpa, until your wisdom is perfected, you should not leave your guru's side. Don't think you can teach just because of what you have studied in books. Without having purified your mind, don't talk about the wisdom you think you have. Don't rush to receive offerings from people before you have given up attachments."

Rechungpa pleaded and pleaded for permission to go. Milarepa finally said, "I promised the devotees I wouldn't send you to Central Tibet, but if you will not listen to what I have said and insist upon going, it is okay for me to give you permission. Now go ahead and prepare to go."

Rechungpa was so thrilled that he almost cried. For several nights, Milarepa had Rechungpa stay with him in his cave and receive more teachings during the night.

At last, Rechungpa was ready to leave, wearing only one white cloth, and carrying a pack on his back and a book of teachings from Milarepa's lineage under his arm. He went to Milarepa to receive his blessing.

Milarepa thought, "Rechungpa has been with me for a very long time and I don't know if we will meet again." He went with Rechungpa for a long distance, until they reached the top of a mountain. At that point, after such a long hike, Milarepa decided it was time for them to part.

Milarepa said, "I tell you, if a child stays by his mother's side, he grows up well. If meditators stay with their gurus, then they won't go in the wrong direction. Although you are leaving without heeding what I say, I will never give up my love for you. And you should continually have me in your mind."

Tears ran down Rechungpa's face as he said, "I always see you, Jetsun, as the Buddha in person, and previously I have never put my hopes in anyone except you. After this life, please be my refuge and guide."

Milarepa cautioned him, "When you arrive in Central Tibet, a dog will grab you by the leg. When that happens, don't forget the guru or your practice." Then Rechungpa prostrated, bowing on the ground, and walked in a circle around him with devotion.

Milarepa thought, "He will turn to look back at me, so I'll stay here until he does. Otherwise, if he doesn't see me, he would be sad." So Milarepa stood there for some time. But Rechungpa didn't look back at his guru. He just kept walking, looking ahead.

Milarepa thought, "He goes without looking back at all. Have wrong thoughts about his guru and Dharma brothers arisen in him?" Milarepa held his energy and projected himself ahead of Rechungpa, and transformed himself into seven yogis, asking all together with one voice,



"Who are you, and who is your guru? Who is your lineage, and what is your meditation? Where are you going, and who told you to go?"

Rechungpa thought, "There is no other yogi who would say such things to me; these are forms of my guru, Milarepa."

He bowed and said,

“Father, great Jetsun, since you ask who I am, I am Rechungpa, my guru is Milarepa, my lineage comes from great Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa, and Marpa. I go in the direction of Central Tibet, and the one who said to go is the Jetsun Guru.”

Then all the seven forms became one yogi, who actually was Milarepa, and said, “Since you didn’t look back at me at all as you went, I came here to test you. I see there is no problem with your connection to me, it is pure. Now, go on to Central Tibet.”

Rechungpa was happy - he touched the crown of his head to Milarepa’s feet with deep respect and devotion, and then went on his journey alone.

Milarepa went back to his cave. The students went to the cave bringing many offerings. When they realized Rechungpa wasn’t there, they took the things they brought to offer Rechungpa and buried them in a metal container in the cave. Then they went up to Milarepa and one of them asked,

“Jetsun, previously you didn’t get up very early. Why did you get up so early today?”

Milarepa said, “I accompanied Rechungpa for a short while to see him off on his journey to Central Tibet. Upon my return I felt very sad, and so I have just been sitting here.”



A student said, “Didn’t you try to persuade Rechungpa not to go?”

“I did; I tried to persuade him not to go,” Milarepa said, and told them what he had said to Rechungpa.

The student said, “At this time when the guru’s body has become old, it’s important for his students to stay near him. Even though you tried to make him stay, he didn’t listen. It was uncaring of him to go.”

Milarepa replied, “The father has been left behind, just like an old dog, and the son, like a white lion, has gone to Central Tibet.”

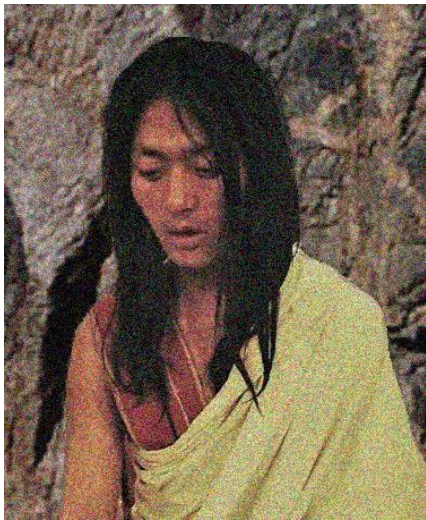
The student said, “You have so much love for him, so surely you arranged a companion to go away with him. Aren’t you tired from traveling such a long distance with him?”

Another student said,

“Rechungpa seems not to care about you. Jetsun, you should just put him out of your mind. You still have others with you like Repa Shiwa ö. They can take care of you here at the cave.”

Milarepa said, “Yes, there are many other yogis but few are like Rechungpa. Though there are many students, few truly have faith and dedication. Rechungpa was with me since he was small. My friend since childhood is like a thorn in my mind. Now Rechungpa has gone; I think of him and am sad.”

He continued, “Students that are like peacocks, concerned about the way they look, just take care that their feathers look good. Students that are like parrots make useless chatter. If you students want to go, then the time has come. Buried in a metal container in the cave below, the tsampa and butter are nibbled by mice, the beer has been turned over by a fox. The meat is being eaten by the crows. Go on ahead, quickly now! You students go on with happy hearts, and hope to meet again with me soon.”



The group of students looked at each other with wide eyes, nudged each other with their elbows, and then went away looking down at the ground, feeling very ashamed, because Milarepa knew they had hidden the offerings rather than giving them to him. They hadn't cared about what Milarepa might need. They deeply regretted what they had done.

They offered their leftovers to him and asked him to teach about impermanence.

Milarepa didn't accept their offerings, but gave them teachings in a song:

“Listen here, you stingy students,
To do good for the sake of becoming famous,
Taking refuge as a Buddhist to protect yourselves from the fears of this life,
Giving things with the hope that you'll get something in return,
Making offerings for your own selfish interests,
These four things won't last in the future.

To hold ganachakra feasts just so you can have nice food,
Being an expert in the Dharma to make yourself famous,
Distracting yourself with meaningless chatter,
Teaching in order to get wealth and riches,
These four won't help other beings.

Not wanting to stay alone and preferring distractions,
Unable to bear hardship and delighting in pleasant activities,
Just wanting to chat when you are supposed to be meditating,
Having great skill only in worldly activities,
With these four you will not become enlightened.”

The students developed devotion to Milarepa, and made prostrations, bowing down on the ground. They said, "Jetsun, please remain in this place. We will offer our respect and service to you according to the Dharma."

Milarepa replied, "I won't stay here for long. I will go. May you students have no problems with your health. I hope we meet again in conditions that are good for teaching Dharma. Be hopeful that we meet again."

Some of the students were very pleased and became his close students. The others had great faith in him but went away to practice Dharma in other places.

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of offerings did the students bring to Milarepa? (only a few offerings – rotting meat, sour beer, and one serving of tsampa)
2. Why did they offer such nice things to Rechunga and so little to Milarepa? (they thought Rechungpa was better because he went to India to study)
3. How did Milarepa show his compassion and kindness toward Rechungpa while he was leaving? (walked with him at the beginning of the journey)
4. Why did Milarepa stand and wait after Rechungpa started walking alone? (so Rechungpa wouldn't be sad if he looked back and didn't see Milarepa)
5. When Milarepa changed his form into seven yogis, what did he want to find out about Rechungpa? (whether he still had devotion, a good and pure connection with Milarepa)
6. Why did the students think Rechungpa didn't care about Milarepa? (he didn't listen to Milarepa and didn't stay with him when he is old)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Being Considerate:

"Students that are like peacocks, concerned about the way they look, just take care that their feathers look good. Students that are like parrots make useless chatter." p. 624.

"Foolish speech will never be exhausted, therefore it's excellent to go without talking." p. 676.

"Those who don't help and have patience whenever they are able, Though they act like a good friend, have many regrets." p. 643-644.

"Be generous to all who are poor, have compassion on those without any power.

*Be of service to those who are wise and disciplined.
Have respect toward your father and mother.”* p. 659.

*“To be harmonious with all is truly king,
And to be harmonious with your father is king of kings.
For good conduct, harmony with your father is excellent.
One should repay one’s mother’s kindness.
Conduct that is harmonious with people makes you attractive.”* p. 451.

*“Be respectful to each of your parents. . . .
Do activities with your mind aware of the Dharma.”* p. 674.

“Continuously take the seat of mindfulness.” p. 90-91.

How would you describe the attitude of the younger students toward Milarepa, when they didn’t make nice offerings to him, and didn’t think of what he might need?
Disrespectful, uncaring, inconsiderate.

How would you describe Rechungpa’s attitude toward Milarepa when Rechungpa insisted on leaving him, when Milarepa is getting old and advised Rechungpa to stay with him?
Stubborn, uncaring, inconsiderate, disobedient.
However, he seemed to be considerate of Milarepa at first, when he thought that if he left, it might save Milarepa from being ignored when the students preferred to be with Rechungpa.

How would you define the word “inconsiderate”? Not caring about what others might need, not thinking about how others might feel, not noticing what difficulties others are having, not being mindful of what you can do to help, thinking only of yourself, being impolite or rude. What is the opposite of inconsiderate? Considerate, being helpful, courteous, polite, caring about what others might need or how they might feel, being mindful of how you can help.

Can you think of some examples of how someone might be inconsiderate in the following situations:

When people are standing in line? Someone cuts in the front of the line.
When people are listening to a person who is speaking? Someone else talks loudly.
When playing a game? Someone cheats.
When students raise hands to answer a question in class? Someone calls out the answer.
When a person is painting? Someone grabs the paint, or bumps against the person’s arm.
When a student is presenting their report to the class? Someone does something distracting.
When people are trying to keep things clean? Someone makes a mess.

In almost any situation in which people are together, there are opportunities to be considerate – or inconsiderate - of others.



Why are some people inconsiderate?

They are thinking only of themselves, and what they want.

Maybe they haven't learned to be aware of how others feel.

Or they crave attention. They need others to react and respond to them.

Or they simply don't care about how others feel. They don't think that others are important.

Some people don't care because they feel they are not appreciated or loved enough.

Or they may be depressed, or having problems at home. Or they may just be having a bad day.

So, we shouldn't judge other people who are inconsiderate.

Instead, we should look at our own behavior - whether we are being considerate of others.

We all have moments when we were not very considerate of others.

We all become distracted by our own needs and problems at times, and fail to notice how we can help someone or be more courteous.

But we can become more considerate when we develop a habit of helping others and having a compassionate mind.

Being considerate is really compassion in action.

It means thinking about the discomfort or suffering of others.

It means thinking about how we can help, how we can make them more comfortable even in very small ways, and how we can avoid annoying them.

Most of us are very considerate to our close friends, as we don't want to lose them, but we can practice being more considerate to family members, teachers and others.

In particular, we can practice this with our parents, who have been so considerate to us, working hard to make us comfortable and happy since we were born.

To be considerate, we are very aware of what is going on around us, wherever we are.

We look around to see if someone could use our help.

We consider, does our behavior fit in with the environment, or are we being too loud?

Are we talking too much when it may be annoying to others?

Are we being patient with others?

Are we making more work for others, or are we making their job easier?

ACTIVITY – Develop and share ideas for being more considerate:

The teacher calls out the following scenarios, one by one, and students volunteer to give an example of behavior that is considerate of others for that scenario.

1. Your family has just finished eating dinner.
2. A new student walks into the lunchroom at school.
3. Your mother isn't feeling well.
4. Your parents are having guests for dinner.
5. You see other kids running around inside the shrine room at the temple.
6. The teacher is about to start the group meditation.
7. It's time for breakfast with your family.