

## THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 16 – Shame and Forgiveness

Milarepa promised Peta he would stay at the same cave a few more days. While Peta was away, he sewed the material she had given him into a hood to cover his head, and gloves and socks.

After a few days, Peta returned and asked him, “Brother, did you sew the material into clothes?”



He replied, “I have.”

He put on the hood, socks and gloves to show her. She was shocked. She had expected him to sew the cloth into clothes to cover his body. His body was bare, but his head and hands and feet were covered, like a crazy man.

Peta exclaimed, “Look at you! My brother has nothing human left in him. He has no shame, and he also ruined the cloth that I worked so hard on to weave. Is it because he has

no time to do anything but meditate, or because he has too much time?”

Milarepa answered, “I am the holy man who seeks what is important and good from this precious human life. Knowing what real shame is, I remain faithful to my practice. I consider all the parts of my body to be equally important. I didn’t ruin the cloth you gave me.”

He continued, “Worldly people don’t know how to feel shame. They feel ashamed of things which are natural, but they are not ashamed of their bad deeds and saying bad things about others, which are truly shameful! Listen to my song about shame.” And he sang a song which included these words:

You who feel ashamed through ignorance  
Blush at things which are not shameful.  
But I, a yogi, know what shame really is.  
Greed and hatred and evil deeds,

Stealing, tricking others, and dishonesty,  
The betrayal of friends,  
All these are the results of distorted perception  
And are truly shameful. But few try to avoid them.  
All the great yogis who have renounced worldly life  
Devote the whole of their lives to the Dharma.  
Through the secret practice of the profound Vajrayana  
Which is the most important of all the important practices  
There is no reason to feel false shame.  
Therefore, Peta, do not create your own misery.  
Bring back your mind to its natural purity.

Peta, with an unhappy face, offered Milarepa the tsampa and meat which she had gotten by begging. She said, "No matter what I say, my brother does not listen to me. But I will not forsake you. Eat these things and I will try to get more."

She prepared to leave. Milarepa wondered how he could convince his sister to learn and practice the Dharma. He said to her, "Even if you do no religious work, live here with me, without committing any sins, as long as these foods and supplies last."

So, she stayed with him for a while in the cave, and Milarepa explained the law of karma to her. As a result, she felt less of a desire for wealth and worldly things.

Meanwhile, their uncle died. Their aunt, in her grief, began to feel remorse, guilt, and shame for the bad things she did to them. So she wanted to find Milarepa. She loaded a dzo – a half yak, half cow – with supplies and food to offer to Milarepa.



When she got near his cave, she left the dzo behind and walked to the cave with her arms loaded full of offerings for him.

Peta saw her coming. As soon as she recognized their aunt, she exclaimed to her brother,  
"Because our aunt made us and our mother suffer in all kinds of ways, it is better not to meet with her."





Peta pulled back the log which formed a bridge to the entrance of the cave, so their aunt couldn't get to the cave.

At that moment, the aunt was at the other side of where the log bridge had been.

She called out,

"Niece, do not pull back the log. Your aunt is here."

Peta answered, "That is just why I pulled it back."

Their aunt said, "Very true, my niece. But now a terrible sense of guilt has arisen in me. Brother and sister, I have come to find you, so put back the bridge. If you don't put it back, then at least tell your brother that I am here."

Milarepa had climbed to the top of a rock. His aunt bowed in a full prostration, showing respect by stretching her body out on the bare ground, and begged to see him. Milarepa thought to himself,

"If I don't eventually meet with her, I will not be acting in accordance with the Dharma. But first I must tell her what she has done wrong."

So, he said to her, "Generally I have given up all attachments to relatives, and especially to my uncle and my aunt. First, you plunged us into misery. Even after I set out on the religious path and came begging, you brutally attacked me. That is why I don't concern myself with you. The song I am going to recite will tell you why. Listen!"

He sang a Song of Shame to his aunt, which included these words:

O my aunt, do you remember what you have done?  
If you have forgotten, I will remind you with this song . . .  
We, mother and children, lost our noble father.  
Then all our wealth was taken from us and we were given misery in return.  
We were scattered like beans with a stick  
By you and our uncle too.  
From that day on, I gave up all attachments to my relatives.  
But when I wandered to the ends of the earth  
I yearned to see my mother and sister, so I returned home.  
My mother was dead and my sister gone,  
Under the weight of sadness and grief,  
I devoted myself totally to meditation.

Because I was starving, I left my cave to beg  
And found myself at my aunt's tent.  
Recognizing the poor yogi,  
She was prompted to anger and violence.  
She called her dog and set him upon me.  
Using a tent pole as a stick,  
She beat my body like one beats the grain off of the grain plants  
I fell face down into a pool of water.  
As I was about to lose my precious life,  
She screamed at me, "Monster of evil,"  
And hated me as the shame of the family.  
My heart, crushed by these terrible words,  
Was torn with pain and roused to furious anger.  
Breathless and stunned, I could not speak.  
By her dishonesty, she took my house and fields  
Even though I no longer wanted them.  
A demon's mind lives in my aunt's body.  
From that day on, I abandoned all my feelings for her.

Then when I arrived at my uncle's door,  
He, with evil in his heart, shouted terrible words at me:  
"The demon of destruction has come!"  
And he called the neighbors to help kill me,  
He cursed me with all sorts of vile words.  
Showers of stones were thrown at me,  
And a stream of arrows came flew at me.  
My heart was struck with unbearable pain.  
At that moment I was close to death.  
A butcher's heart is in my uncle's body.  
From that day onward I abandoned all my feelings for him.

To this poor yogi, relatives are more cruel than enemies.  
Later, when I was meditating in the mountains,  
The faithful Zessay, who could not forsake me,  
Came to me out of her love.  
With affectionate words, soothing to my mind,  
She consoled my wounded heart.  
With nourishing food and drink  
She eased my thirst and hunger,  
I am deeply grateful to her.  
Even so, except for the devotees of the Dharma,  
I have no reason to see anyone, even Zessay,  
And still less reason to see my aunt.  
So leave now while it is still day.

This is what he sang to his aunt. He wanted her to understand that as a yogi, he doesn't want visitors and family attachments, but only wants to teach Dharma to those who are interested in hearing it.

His aunt, weeping and repeatedly making prostrations, begged him,



"Nephew, all along you have been right. I beg your forgiveness and I sincerely confess my guilt. My feeling of remorse is terrible. I never completely lost my feeling for you, nephew and niece, and so I came looking for you. Please, let me see you. If you do not grant my wish, I will kill myself."

Milarepa couldn't bear to refuse her. As terrible as she had acted all of his life, she was now trying to be a better person. He was about to put the log back in place so she could come across and see him. But Peta stopped him, and whispered to him. Her words were something like this:



“Don’t put the log back. Remember what she did to us and our mother? She never changed in



all those years. Only now when her husband is dead, she comes crawling to us. She’s just lonely, and she wants to be relieved of her sins before she dies. She’s afraid of going to a hell world because of what she’s done. She is selfish and terrible. Don’t reward her for her evil behavior. Just leave her there. Let her think about all the evil she has done.”

Milarepa didn’t agree with his sister. He already made his aunt remember her evil behavior, and it was not his job to punish her. She would experience the results of her karma automatically. And, he didn’t need to stay away from her in order to protect himself from her anger any longer. So, refusing to see her now would seem like he is being revengeful. And he should not ignore her when she genuinely is taking a step toward becoming a better person.

He said, “Normally a man’s mind becomes polluted by drinking from the same cup as a person who has a polluted mind and who has destroyed people’s trust in him. But my aunt has not destroyed any sacred trust, and because I am a devotee of the Dharma, I will let her come to see me.”

He meant that normally, we should avoid people who behave badly and whom we cannot trust, so we don’t become influenced into behaving badly also. But because he practices Dharma, such people cannot influence him.

So, he put the log back in place. He was forgiving, and let his aunt visit with him as she wished. He spoke with her about the law of karma.

From that time onward, she focused her whole attention on practice of Dharma. She also practiced meditation and became a yogini! She transformed from being selfish, greedy and cruel woman to being devoted to meditation and Dharma.

## QUESTIONS:

1. What did Milarepa do with the cloth Peta gave him? (sewed it into hood, socks, gloves)
2. What did Peta think he should be ashamed of? (not wearing proper clothes)
3. How did Peta get the meat and tsampa that she offered Milarepa? (from begging)
4. Why did Milarepa want his sister to stay with him? (so she could learn and practice Dharma)
5. When Peta stayed with Milarepa, she became less interested in what things? (wealth and worldly things)
6. Why did their aunt come to visit them? (her husband died and she felt guilty about what she had done to them)
7. What did Peta do when the aunt arrived? (pulled back the log bridge to the cave)
8. How did Milarepa feel toward his aunt after she cried, made prostrations, begged to see him, and told him how guilty she feels? (forgiving)

## DHARMA DISCUSSION – Shame and forgiveness:

*You who feel ashamed through ignorance  
Blush at things which are not shameful.  
But I, a yogi, know what shame really is . . . .*

*Greed and hatred and evil deeds,  
Stealing, tricking others, and dishonesty,  
The betrayal of friends,  
All these are the results of distorted perception  
And are truly shameful. But few try to avoid them.*

*All the great yogis who have renounced worldly life  
Devote the whole of their lives to the Dharma.  
Through the secret practice of the profound Vajrayana  
Which is the most important of all important practices,  
There is no reason to feel false shame.  
Therefore, Peta, do not create your own misery.  
Bring back your mind to its natural purity.*

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa, p. 140)

What does the word “shame” make you think of?

People often say, “What a shame” when they hear of something unpleasant or unfortunate.

What does the similar word “ashamed” make you think of?

Feeling ashamed, being embarrassed - the feeling you get when you get caught doing something wrong or embarrassing. When someone says “You should be ashamed of yourself.”

For example, sometimes we may feel ashamed when we are different from others.

You may have clothes that aren’t as new and modern as other kids’, you may not have a popular toy that others have, you go to the temple when your friends are going to parties.

Maybe you don’t like something about the way you look.

Maybe your house is smaller or has older furniture than your friend’s house.

Maybe your family eat foods that are different from what your friends like to eat.

You may feel ashamed when you don’t perform something well.

Maybe you think others are laughing at you, and you feel embarrassed.

Or you may be ashamed of the way someone in your family looks or behaves.

Like in the story, Peta was ashamed of the way Milarepa looked, with his starving skeleton-thin green body and no proper clothes – a hood, socks and gloves but no shirt or robe.

Most people are ashamed of these types of things, because they think it is so important to look beautiful, and be popular and admired, to have nice things.

Of course we may think those things are important – and people around us think they’re important - because we don’t know, or we forget, about what is really more important in life.

What does Milarepa say *is* really important in life? Practicing Dharma, purifying the mind.

Actually, shame can be a good thing! It helps us practice Dharma and purify our minds.

How? By being ashamed of doing things that are not Dharmic, that are against Dharma.

Milarepa gave some examples of types of behaviors that are truly shameful - that people *should* be ashamed of:

Being greedy, selfish, hating another person, taking things that don’t belong to you, lying, being dishonest, saying bad things about others, not being a good friend.

If we do these things, we *should* feel ashamed, because that makes us avoid doing it again.

What if other people treat us badly, provoking us to get angry?

Milarepa pointed out that usually, we should try to stay away from people who make us angry or could cause us to behave badly.

They may cause us to do something in anger that we might regret.

So he had tried to stay away from his aunt before. He knew she would treat him badly again, and he didn’t want to get angry about it.

But when she felt sorry for what she had done, he was forgiving and didn’t stay away.

And because of that, she started to learn and practice Dharma!

Like the aunt, if someone honestly is sorry for what they have done, and if we are forgiving, then they can become a better person. Sometimes we first may need to explain how they have harmed us, like Milarepa explained to his aunt, so they won’t treat us badly again.



# ACTIVITY – CROSSWORD PUZZLE:

- Across:
1. Marpa was \_\_\_\_\_ a field, preparing it to grow crops, when Milarepa first saw him.
  2. Milarepa meditated inside of \_\_\_\_\_.
  3. Type of storm that Milarepa created with magic.
  4. Milarepa constructed tall \_\_\_\_\_ by himself as Marpa instructed him to do.
  5. The aunt and \_\_\_\_\_ of Milarepa treated him and his mother and sister very badly.
  6. The name of the guru of Milarepa's guru.
  7. The girls with fancy jewelry and new clothes had too much \_\_\_\_\_.
  8. Coming back to his village, Milarepa found the \_\_\_\_\_ of his mother in his house.
  9. We should feel \_\_\_\_\_ when we act in ways that are not according to Dharma.
  10. Milarepa taught his sister and aunt about \_\_\_\_\_, the law of cause and effect.
  11. After he developed powers from meditation, Milarepa could \_\_\_\_\_ in the air.

- Down:
1. Milarepa's mother told him to learn \_\_\_\_\_ magic for revenge on his aunt and uncle.
  2. Milarepa's name when he was young was Good \_\_\_\_\_.
  3. Peta and others who found Milarepa meditating thought at first he was a \_\_\_\_\_.
  4. Milarepa's aunt wanted to have his house and \_\_\_\_\_ where she could grow barley.
  5. Men who were \_\_\_\_\_ of animals found Milarepa in a cave.
  6. Milarepa ate only \_\_\_\_\_ for years when he had no other food.
  7. The name of Milarepa's guru.
  8. Milarepa had big sores on his \_\_\_\_\_ from carrying bricks.
  9. Milarepa's sister's name was \_\_\_\_\_.
  10. Milarepa wore a meditation \_\_\_\_\_ to sit for long hours when meditating or sleeping.
  11. Marpa's \_\_\_\_\_, Dakmema, always was kind to Milarepa.

