

THE LIFE OF GAMPOPA Part 3 – Avoid Criticizing Others And Know Your Own Faults

After Milarepa explained the meaning of Gampopa's dream, and explained that Gampopa will be free from the cycle of birth and death and become a buddha, he gave Gampopa some important instructions. He said,

“Only follow the instructions of the guru and your own determination. Don't obey others' advice, because then you will get confused.”

And he said, “Do not look for the faults, mistakes or weaknesses of companions around you. Don't let your mind get taken over with unwholesome thoughts. Don't involve yourself in correcting others.”

Finally, he taught about dreams. Then he said to Gampopa, Rechungpa and Shiwa Ö that they should remember the dreams they have that night, and the next morning, he will interpret what the dreams mean.

The next morning, Shiwa Ö was the first to come to Milarepa and tell his dream. Shiwa Ö said, “Last night, I had an excellent dream. In the east, the warm sun rose and I dreamed that it dissolved into the center of my heart.”

Then Rechungpa reported his dream. He said, “I dreamed that I went to three great valleys and shouted in a loud voice.”



Then Gampopa, with tears falling down his cheeks, said, “I had a very bad dream.”

Milarepa said, “You don't know if it was good or bad. Tell me the dream.”

Gampopa said, “I dreamed that I killed many men of different races and stopped their breath. I must have great negativity.”

Milarepa consoled him, “Teacher-son, you don't need to weep. Look at your hand.” Then Milarepa took his hand and said, “Son, you haven't given me any doubt in my hopes for you. I

have had great hopes that you will become someone who liberates all sentient beings from samsara (the cycle of birth and death), and this is something that will indeed happen. A son (you, Gampopa) has been born to me, this old father. So now I have served the activity of the Buddha's teaching."

Then he explained about the other students' dreams. He said, "The dream of Shiwa Ö was okay. Because you don't have so much motivation, you will not help vast numbers of beings. But you will go to a pure land. Rechungpa, because of your disobedience - you disobeyed my command three times - you will have to be born as a human again and become a very famous teacher, three times, living in three different valleys.



After the discussion about the dreams, Gampopa meditated intensely for a month.

First, he had a vision of the seven Medicine Buddhas.

His mind was so still in meditation that he barely needed to breathe. He was able to take only one breath each day!

In his meditation in the evening, he saw the forms of the Buddha that can be seen only by Bodhisattvas, people who will be Buddhas in the future.



The next day, in the early morning, he saw a vision of the Buddha Shakyamuni with a thousand other buddhas.

When the sun rose, he went to tell Milarepa, and prostrated to him, bowing on the ground.

Gampopa didn't need to tell Milarepa of his visions and experiences in meditation – Milarepa already knew about them.

Milarepa said, “Now you have seen the face of the deity, and the forms of the Buddhas. I want you to stay here with me, your old father, but because of the connection of your previous intentions, you must go to central Tibet and meditate there. The obstacles that you have faced so far in meditation I have cleared away. But now you will face the danger and obstacles that come when you have the powers to see things that others cannot see. When people get these powers, there is a danger that they might use them for wrong reasons – to enjoy finding out information about others and to use information for their own convenience - so it is very important to keep these experiences and powers extremely secret. These dangers and obstacles won’t overwhelm great beings who have the sharpest minds. Because you are a great being, and you will be able to help other beings, you should gather students and take care of them.”

Gampopa asked, “When will it be time for me to teach students?”

Milarepa replied, “When you see the true nature of the mind, and it becomes stable without wavering. After some time, you will be able to have clear insight toward the mind, unlike what you have now. At that time, you will see directly and be certain that your old father is a buddha. At that time you should gather students and take care of them.”

Then Milarepa said, “If your inner energy (prana) can enter your fingers, then you will be able to overcome any difficulties with this energy. See if you can do it now.”



That evening, Gampopa made a pile of dirt on top of a flat rock and placed his fingertips on it.

He focused his mind intensely on his fingers for a long time, and brought his energy to the tips of his fingers.

At night, the dirt began blowing around in a circle like a whirlwind, and then the pile of dirt disappeared.

The next morning, he told Milarepa what had happened. Milarepa said, “You have not fully mastered the (prana) inner energy, but you are able to work with it. You will be able to perform miracles such as creating objects and changing them, and you will attain the supreme and ordinary (siddhi) miraculous powers. Now you don’t need my help; you may go and practice on your own. Go to Gampo Dar Mountain in the east, which is like a royal seat; its peak is like a precious ornamented hat like the one I am wearing. In front there are seven mountains like mounds of jewels that look like seven ministers bowing to a king. Around this mountain is where your students are. Go there, and help the beings.”

Then Milarepa gave him empowerments and blessings, and all the Dharma teachings he had learned. He also gave him a piece of a plant used as medicine in Tibet, and blessed it by placing his tongue on it. He gave him a small gift of a pouch containing tinder, to light a fire. Finally, he said, “Now go to that land and meditate.”

So Gampopa went to Ü, central Tibet, and Milarepa accompanied him for part of the way. When they reached a stone bridge, they stopped, and Milarepa told Gampopa to put down his load, sit down and talk for a while.

Milarepa gave him some final instructions:

“Teacher from Ü (central Tibet), it isn’t good to spend time with people who are full of the three poisons – attachment (which includes greed and desire), aversion (which includes hatred and anger) and ignorance - because you will be influenced by them.



There are some people who feel that everyone is their enemy, who always criticize people and criticize the Dharma. Anger and hatred burns within them like fire. They are similar to a snake. Even though a snake doesn’t have hands or feet, when people see it, they are afraid and run away. This is a sign that snakes have a lot of aggression within them. Because they have a lot of aggression, they think of everything and everyone as their enemy.

“And there are other people who want to get and keep all kinds of things. They say that one day they may be in need of things. They also say that they can’t practice Dharma unless they have wealth, because they must first gather merit by doing good deeds and making offerings, and they must be wealthy to be able to do that. They get involved in bad ways of earning money. They have strong attachment that boils like water in their minds.

“And yet there are other people who don’t meditate, don’t try to develop compassion, and have great ignorance within them, like being covered with darkness. If you try to give such people good advice, they won’t listen. If they do listen to your advice, they ask questions, and get upset or angry. They listen with a narrow mind, only believing what they want to believe. So, don’t spend time with people who are full of the three poisons.

“In general, you should be full of mindfulness, as aware of what is around you as an animal that has been wounded, or a bird. Remain peaceful, with good self-control. Have great patience. Be harmonious with everyone. Be clean. Pass your time in silent retreats in caves in the mountains. Even though you realize that your own mind is buddha, don’t abandon the guru, the vajra master. Work as much as possible on purification and increasing your merit and wisdom. Although you understand karma, avoid doing even the slightest negative action. Continue your dharma practice of four sessions every day. Although you understand that you

and others are equal, do not criticize the Dharma or any person. Do not have attachments and clinging. There's a danger that you could be carried off by the demon of conceited joy."

Milarepa also told him to come back and see him on a certain day in the future, so Gampopa knew he would be able to see his guru again. Milarepa placed his foot on Gampopa's head, which empowered Gampopa to be a fully-qualified vajra master, and then told him he could go. Gampopa crossed the bridge over the river. Then he thought he heard Milarepa's voice from far away calling him to come back again. He listened, and yes, Milarepa was calling him to come back! Gampopa joyfully rushed back to his guru. Milarepa said, "This key instruction is so precious, but if I don't give it to you, to whom will I give it?"



Gampopa happily asked whether he should make an offering to receive the precious teaching. Milarepa said that he didn't need an offering. And then he lifted up his robe, showing his buttocks covered with rough hard skin from sitting for so many years in meditation.

He said, "There is no more profound teaching than to practice. It is through practicing, with my bottom becoming like this, that good

qualities have arisen in my mind. You too should develop perseverance and practice."

At this shocking sight, Gampopa would always remember the instruction to work hard in his practice of Dharma.

Then Gampopa journeyed on to Central Tibet and practiced intense meditation for seven years. Many people visited him and made offerings, and Gampopa donated the offerings to the local people.

One day, a person visited who appeared to be a king with a big chunk of turquoise around his neck. He promised that he would provide Gampopa with whatever he needs. He said,

"I am a sky-flying hungry ghost. Although I don't mean to harm others, many beings suffer because of me. I confess my evil deeds and ask that you grant me refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and allow me to take the vow of a Bodhisattva."

Gampopa allowed him to take refuge and the vow to seek enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, and gave him teachings on compassion, refuge, the Bodhisattva vow, and meditation instructions. Then the spirit disappeared into space.

Gampopa planned to do a silent meditation retreat for 12 years, so he built a little house to stay in. But one day, a lady who had covered her face in ashes and held peacock feathers in her hand said to him, "It's more important to make sure the teachings are passed on to others than to enter into a long meditation retreat."

And sure enough, a few days later, some great dharma practitioners came to him and wanted to be his students. He gave them teachings, and then more and more great practitioners came and wanted to be his students, so he couldn't do long silent retreats. He had to take care of teaching his students.

Gampopa soon was able to perform miracles and wonders like Milarepa. He could fly up into the air, appear as a great fire, disappear and reappear, and appear to be as huge as a mountain but fit into a tiny room at the same time. Once he appeared as a giant skeleton riding a tiger in the sky! He didn't do these miracles to show "Look what I can do," but to help his visitors and students develop great faith in him and motivate them in their Dharma practice.

QUESTIONS:

1. What was amazing about Gampopa's breathing when his mind was still in meditation? (he only needed to take one breath in a day)
2. Why did Milarepa tell Gampopa that if he has powers to see what others can't see, he should keep it secret? (because they could be used for wrong reasons)
3. What did Gampopa do with the energy in his fingers? (he made a pile of dirt blow around and disappear)
4. Milarepa told Gampopa not to spend time with people who are full of the three poisons – what are the three poisons? (attachment [or desire, greed], aversion [or hatred and anger], and ignorance)
5. Milarepa said that people who feel that everyone is their enemy, who always criticize others, are like what kind of animal? (a snake)
6. Why do people run away from snakes? (because they have a lot of aggression in them)
7. What did Milarepa teach Gampopa by showing the rough hard skin on his bottom? (to work hard in his practice of Dharma)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Avoid criticizing others and know your own faults:

“Do not look for the mistakes or weaknesses of companions around you. Don’t let your mind get taken over with unwholesome thoughts. Don’t involve yourself in correcting others.”
(Milarepa, 100,000 Songs, p. 514).

“There are some people who feel that everyone is their enemy, who always criticize people and criticize the Dharma. Anger and hatred burns within them like fire. They are similar to a snake.”
(p. 520)

“Although you understand that you and others are equal, do not criticize the Dharma or any person.” (p. 521)

“Talk a lot about rights and wrongs, and enemies will surround you.” (p. 40)

“If you have contempt for those you spend time with, you’ll feel dejected.” (p. 41)

“These days, people have not accumulated merit, and so they cannot see many inner qualities of people. Instead all they see are the tiny outer faults. . . . Furthermore, when you see lots of negative conduct [in others], then your mind becomes twisted.” (p. 198-199)

“If you don’t know the mind-streams of others, do not denigrate [put down] people or their views; there’s a danger that you’ll fall into arrogance.” (p. 281)

“Evil ones not taking stock of themselves is the deceptive means for bringing their own demise.”
(p. 448)

Milarepa taught Gampopa not to criticize people.

What do we mean by “criticize”?

To tell someone they are doing something wrong, that what they do or what they say or what they have isn’t good, or that they don’t look good. It also means cutting someone down.

In the previous chapter, we discussed how to respond to criticism, and how we feel hurt when we are criticized.

By remembering our own pain when we are criticized, we can think about how it hurts others if we criticize them.

Then we can try to be more careful not to criticize others.

If they did something wrong, point out what they did wrong in a way that’s helpful and gentle.

Not only should avoid criticizing people directly, to their face, but we also shouldn’t criticize indirectly, by telling someone else.

For example, telling a friend that someone talks or walks funny, or has ugly hair or clothes, or did something that was embarrassing.

Why? Because that person might overhear us.

And, because we're setting a bad example to the one we are speaking to, of talking behind someone's back, telling bad things about others.

If we often say bad things about others, it's because we have many bad thoughts about them. Sometimes we need to have certain critical thoughts - we should notice when people have bad behavior and bad qualities, so then we stay away from them.

But when we have a habit of often thinking negatively about others, it may be our way of trying to feel better about ourselves – we cut down others when we don't feel good about ourselves.

But actually, we feel better when we have positive thoughts about others!

Can you think of why we might get into a habit of having critical thoughts about others? It can easily happen when we are around people who make many critical comments about others.

How can we avoid having too many critical thoughts of others?

When we notice we're having a critical thought about a person, think of something you like about them, a good quality, a talent, sport or skill they have, or something good that they did. Substitute the good thought for the bad one.

And, think about your own faults, weaknesses, misbehavior, and mistakes.

Because, knowing what we do wrong is the only way we can learn what we can do to become a better person!

Gampopa, having developed a good character and the discipline of a monk, already knew and corrected most of his faults and weaknesses when he met Milarepa.

But, as we learned in the previous chapter, when Milarepa pointed out the dishonesty of the other teacher, Gampopa got the message that he, too, better be mindful and careful not to be dishonest. He noticed his own weakness that he wasn't always very mindful.

And as we learned in this chapter, Milarepa gave Gampopa instructions on weaknesses he might develop if he stays around the wrong kind of people.

That made Gampopa understand he wasn't perfect yet, he still needed to watch out for his faults and weaknesses, and not to fall under the negative influences of others.

If Gampopa needed to watch out, so do we!

Actually, it's the most basic and important instruction of the Buddha - to purify our minds, by recognizing our faults and weaknesses, and working to correct them.

How we can remember to avoid criticizing others and instead notice our own faults:

Point with your finger. Do you see three fingers pointing back at you?

When we point out someone else's weakness or mistake, imagine that you are pointing your finger at them, and notice your three fingers pointing back at you.

This helps us remember, when we see someone else's weakness or mistake, we should be looking at our own weaknesses and mistakes instead.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Know your weaknesses:

From the following list of faults and weaknesses (which we all have sometimes), think about how often you have them. Write an "O" next to the five faults or weaknesses that you have most often, and an "X" next to the five that you have least often.

- I want to have new things
- I am lazy
- I criticize someone without making sure it's gentle and helpful
- I show off to others new things that I got
- I have negative thoughts about someone who never hurt me
- I get angry easily
- I want to have what someone else has
- I show off to others how well I can do something
- I don't like to be told what to do
- I am easily annoyed when others don't pay attention to me
- I am bossy (I like to tell others what to do or what they're doing wrong)
- I don't do what my parent or teacher asks me to do right away
- I take something without first asking for it (without permission)
- I take more than I need
- I am impatient
- I do what I want without thinking whether it may annoy others
- I don't listen to what others have to say
- I don't admit when I made a mistake
- I don't allow others to go first
- I don't offer to help

2. Practice substituting good thoughts about someone for critical thoughts about them:

Students stand in a circle. Each student thinks of a person who they don't like, or who has annoyed, humiliated, embarrassed, insulted or hurt them. One student tosses a bean bag to another student while saying something good about the person they don't like. It can be something that they like about the person, a good quality, a skill, talent, game or sport that the person does well, something good that the person did, or something nice about the way they look. Similarly, the student who caught the bean bag says something good about the person who they don't like as it is tossed to the next student, and so on, until all students have thrown the bean bag.