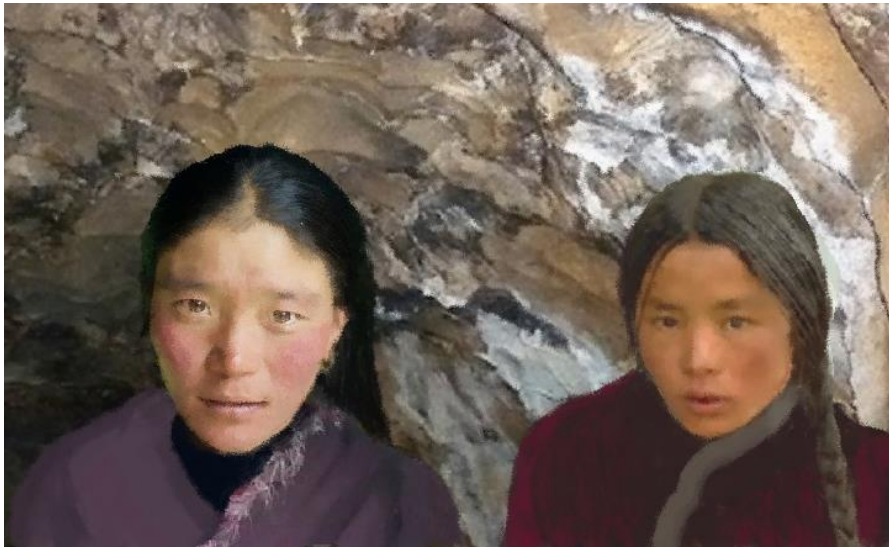


THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 14 – Interdependence

Milarepa's sister, Peta, had provided Milarepa with food and beer after he had survived only on nettles for years. A few days later, Peta returned with Zessay, bringing meat, butter, barley flour (tsampa), and beer for him. They felt extreme pity for him. He was thin like a skeleton, his skin a green color, his hair long and wild, and living for so long alone without proper clothes or food. He appeared to be not even a human being.



So Peta said, “From whatever point of view you look at my elder brother, you cannot call him a man.”

She said to Milarepa, “You should ask for food, and little by little eat the food that humans eat. I will give you what you need to make clothes.”

Zessay added, “And whatever you do about asking for food, I too will give you clothing.”



Milarepa said, “I don't know when I will die, and I have no time or desire to go begging to get food. If I freeze to death, I wouldn't regret it, because it is for the Dharma. I would not find satisfaction by indulging in eating, drinking, and laughter with relatives and friends gathered around me, and by wearing fine clothes and having enough food, but not being able to

meditate as I wish. Therefore, I want neither your clothing nor your food. I will not listen to you nor will I go begging.”

Peta responded, “Well, then, elder brother, what do you think will satisfy you? Is there nothing better than your misery?”

Milarepa explained, “The three lower worlds – the hell world, the animal world, and the hungry ghost world – are infinitely more terrible than my misery. Many beings wish they had only the suffering that I have. I will gain happiness by reaching my goal.”

Zessay said to Milarepa, “The way you live your life, as a yogi, is just as you told me before. And I marvel at this.”

Peta said, “No matter what my brother says, I cannot bear his complete lack of food and clothing. Good food and clothing will not keep you from meditating, so I am going to bring you materials to make a cloak. Since you don’t want to beg for food, then, according to your desire, you can die of misery alone in the wilderness. But if you don’t die, I will bring you what you need to make clothing.”

They left, and Milarepa ate the good food they had brought. He enjoyed the food, but it made his body uncomfortable because he had gone without food for so long. And so he couldn’t meditate! That made him extremely frustrated. He thought that there was no greater problem than the inability to meditate.



So he broke the seal of the scroll of paper that his lama, Marpa, had given him. He read what was written on the paper. It contained instructions to overcome problems and improve practice, and it advised him to take good food at this time.

Milarepa followed the instructions, which included exercises for the body, breathing techniques, and meditation techniques.

After he ate good food every day, his health improved, and his body looked and felt much better. The problems went away, and he experienced joy, a clear mind, and pure awareness. He understood that all things are interdependent.

He remembered that he owed all this understanding, joy, and success in meditation to Peta and Zessay, because they had brought him food. He expressed his gratitude in meditation so that their merit would help them become enlightened. He sang a song about interdependence, including these words:

The service that others have done for me, have planted a seed for their enlightenment and mine,

This body, difficult to get, easy to destroy, has regained health, thanks to nourishing food.

My body, nurtured by my father and mother, and the teaching of the holy lama, these two interacting have brought me to the true Dharma.

This rocky cave in a deserted land, and my devotion to the noble path, These two interact for the fulfillment of my goal.

My perseverance in meditation and the faith of the beings in the three worlds, These two interacting result in success in my service to all beings.

And the essence of this interaction is compassion.

The great yogi meditates in the rocky cave, and devotees bring him food.

These two interacting lead them together toward Enlightenment, And the essence of this interaction is sharing merits.

The compassion of the good lama, and the student's perseverance in meditation,

These two interacting ensure the upholding of the Dharma,

And the essence of this interaction is their earnest commitment.

Meditating with much dedication, Milarepa noticed that he had some new powers. During the day he felt that he could change his body however he wanted, and he could float into the air. At night, in his dreams, he could freely explore the whole universe. He could visit the Buddha worlds and listen to teachings there. He could teach Dharma to other beings in other worlds.



His body could be in flames and spouting water at the same time.



And he was actually able to fly through space!

He flew to another cave to meditate, and then started flying back to Horse Tooth White Rock.

As he passed over a small village, he saw a man plowing a field with his son. The man was related to someone who was killed when Milarepa caused his uncle's house to collapse. The son saw Milarepa flying overhead and cried out,

"Father, look at that fantastic thing! A man flying through the air!"

The father stopped and looked up. He said with disgust, "It is no great wonder. It's the son of that wicked woman, White Jewel; it's that sneaky, misbehaved Mila, wracked by starvation. Don't let his shadow fall on you. Keep on plowing." The father kept moving ahead, fearful that if he were touched by Milarepa's shadow, he would be harmed by Milarepa's black magic.

The son said, "If a man can fly, misbehaved or not, there is nothing better than that! So look, father!" And the son kept looking at Milarepa.

Seeing the father and son, Milarepa wanted to help others, and he thought that maybe he should now work for the good of sentient beings by teaching them. But just then, a yidam deity spoke to him, saying,

"Devote yourself totally to meditation in this life, in accordance with the lama's instructions. There is nothing greater than serving the teachings of the Buddha and saving sentient beings through meditation."

Milarepa thought, "If I meditate as long as I live, I will be setting the best example for future students to give up the worldly life and meditate." And he felt certain that the tradition of the Dharma and sentient beings would get the most benefit from that.

Then he thought, "I've stayed in this place too long. People saw me flying. If I stay here any longer, I will be influenced by the worldly life, and my meditation will be disturbed by the Eight Worldly Reactions (fear of losing good things, being unpopular, being blamed, and suffering, and hoping for good things, praise, fame, and sensory pleasure). So I must go and meditate at Chuwar according to what my lama said."

Carrying the pot in which he always cooked his nettles, he left Horse Tooth White Rock. As he walked along, his body still felt weak from not eating enough for several years. His foot, which was rough with cracked skin, stumbled on the uneven ground outside the cave, and he fell. The pot fell to the ground, so the handle broke off, and the pot rolled down the hill. He ran to stop it. The layer of dried nettle soup residue which was stuck to the inside of the pot broke off in a single green piece in the shape of the inside of the pot. Milarepa remembered that all things are impermanent, and he sang a song about impermanence.

As he was singing, some hunters sat down nearby to take a rest. One of them said, "Yogi, your song has a nice melody. Now that you have broken your clay cooking pot, what are you going to do with it?" Another one said, "How did your body become so thin and so green?"

Milarepa answered, "From having nothing to feed it."

They said, "How marvelous! Well, get up and come over here." And they shared their meal with him.

While Milarepa was eating, a young hunter said, "You are a capable man. If instead of this misery you lived a worldly life, you could have ridden an excellent horse, strong like a young lion. You could have had armor and weapons and conquered your enemies. Rich and famous, you would have had the good fortune to protect your kind relatives. If you didn't do that, you could have been a businessman and could have had the pleasure of being your own boss. At worst, even if you were someone's servant, with good food and clothing you would have been healthier in body and mind. You didn't know this before, but now, do something about it."

An old hunter said, "Indeed, he seems to be a good yogi. There is no danger that he will fall for our worldly advice. So keep quiet." Then to Milarepa, he said, "Oh you whose voice is so pleasant, please sing us a song for our spiritual benefit."

Milarepa replied, "In your eyes I may seem incredibly miserable. You do not know that there is no one happier and more sensible than I in the world. Since I live in the highest happiness you can imagine, listen to my song." And he sang a song that taught them about how to control the mind, which is like controlling a wild horse, and which leads to Buddha-hood, Enlightenment, the best happiness.

After the hunters left, he resumed his journey toward Chuwar.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why didn't Milarepa want to go out and beg for food? (it would interfere with his meditation, and he wouldn't be happy eating and laughing with friends and relatives)
2. What did Milarepa think was the worst problem for him? (not being able to meditate)
3. The scroll from Marpa included instructions for exercises, meditation and breathing techniques. What did it say about food? (that he should eat good food at this time)
4. When he felt better and his problems went away after following the instructions and eating the food, how did he feel toward Peta and Zessay? (grateful)
5. What are some of the new powers that Milarepa had? (float and fly in the air, spray water and fire from his body at the same time; and in his dreams he could travel around the universe, visit Buddha worlds, and teach beings in other worlds)
6. How could Milarepa best help other beings? (by meditating, being an example to others to meditate)
7. What did he remember, and sing about, when his cooking pot fell and broke? (all things are impermanent)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Interdependence:

"To give thanks due to all sentient beings who are my parents, I do Dharma work in this place."

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa p. 124)

*"The services given by my benefactors have sown the seed for their illumination and mine.
This body, difficult to attain, easy to destroy, has regained health, thanks to nourishment. . . .
My illusory body nurtured by my father and mother, and the teaching of the holy lama,
These two interacting brought me to the true Dharma. . . .
The great yogi meditates in the rocky cave, and benefactors bring him food.
These two interacting lead them together toward Enlightenment.
And the essence of this interaction lies in sharing merits.
The compassion of the good lama, and the disciple's perseverance in meditation,
These two interacting ensure the upholding of the Dharma,
And the essence of this interaction lies in their solemn commitment."*

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa p. 128)

After he followed the instructions of his lama, and ate good food, Milarepa realized that all things are interdependent. What does that mean? What is "interdependence?"

First, let's think about what "dependence" means. A little baby is dependent on his parents for everything – the baby can't take care of himself at all.

When we grow older, we take care of ourselves, and we also help many other people - family, friends, neighbors, classmates, and even strangers. Why?

We know that we all help each other. We hope others will help us when we need it.

We know that we depend on others and others depend on us - we are interdependent.

Milarepa understood that he was dependent on his parents, which gave him his body, and dependent on his lama for the teachings, which led him to the Dharma.

He was dependent on the people who brought him food, and that would lead all of them toward Enlightenment, because they earned merit by bringing him food.

He knew that other people are dependent on him to meditate and be an example of the path to Enlightenment, saving them from the suffering of life in the world, samsara.

By singing his songs, he inspired people to practice Dharma and meditate, to find real happiness.

We are dependent not only on our parents and teachers, but on an infinite number of people who directly or indirectly provide our food, build and repair our house, make all of the things we own, and help make our society and environment safe and pleasant to live in, and make us happy and comfortable.

We also are interdependent with trees. A tree needs carbon dioxide, a gas that we breathe out. And in order to breathe, we need oxygen, a gas that the tree leaves give us in return. So we are dependent on the tree and the tree is dependent on us.

And we are interdependent with bees and flowers. A bee is dependent on flowers for pollen, and the flowers are dependent on the bee to carry the pollen to another plant so it can produce fruits, which include seeds, which make more plants. The bee and the flowers are interdependent, and we are dependent on the bee and the flowers, because we need to eat the fruits and vegetables from the plants that are pollinated by the bees!

So, we should remember to be grateful to all the beings who provide all the things we need in our life, and willingly help others whenever we can. We all depend on each other, and we increase our merit and happiness by helping others.

ACTIVITY

Discuss how you are interdependent with the following people: POLICE, ROAD CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, GROCERY STORE EMPLOYEES, RESTAURANT EMPLOYEES, TRUCK DRIVERS, TRAIN OPERATORS, CUSTODIANS, STORE EMPLOYEES, BAKERS, COOKS, FARMERS and FARM WORKERS, FISHERMEN, FOOD SERVERS, FACTORY WORKERS, FOOD PACKERS, MECHANICS.