

THE LIFE OF MARPA Part 2 – Gratitude and Generosity

When Marpa made the long journey over many months through the mountains, returning to Tibet from India, he brought the teachings from the great powerful Indian gurus, including Naropa and Maitripa, translated into Tibetan. The people of Tibet were so happy and grateful to receive these teachings from the great gurus in their own language, that they told all their friends and family. And they offered Marpa the most precious gifts they could find, including gold.

After some time in Tibet, Marpa again made the long journey back over the mountains to India, taking the gold with him. On his way, as he traveled through Nepal, he made offerings to his previous teachers. The teachers are called gurus, or Lamas, in Tibetan.

When he arrived in India, he went back through the knee-deep water to visit Shiwa Sangpo again. He meditated there with Shiwa Sangpo and stayed deep in meditation, in the ultimate peace and bliss, for seven straight days. Afterward, he made offerings of food and everything needed for a one-month-long ganachakra feast, and organized the ceremony so a large group of people could chant and practice teachings together for the whole time. Shiwa Sangpo told Marpa that he would meet Naropa again.



Marpa also went to see Maitripa, one of his two main gurus. While he was with Maitripa, he remained deep in meditation for seven days.

Afterward, Maitripa gave him more teachings.

Maitripa told him that he should back go to Tibet again where there would be many people who would understand and practice the teachings and become enlightened.

Marpa made offerings of food and all items needed for a one-month-long ganachakra feast so he could share and celebrate with a large group of people together with Maitripa.

And Maitripa also told him that he will meet his other main guru, Naropa, again.



Marpa went to see a female guru who was called Yogini Bone Ornament because of the bone ornament she wore in her hair.

He offered her a ganachakra feast, and she gave him teachings. She also told him that he would meet Naropa.

And indeed, Marpa wanted to be with his dearest guru, Naropa. But where was Naropa?

He heard that Naropa had attained such great powers that he could make himself appear and disappear in different ways. That might make it very difficult to find him! The only thing

Marpa could do was travel around and ask people if they had any information about Naropa.

So that's what he did. He made offerings of ganachakra feasts to many different gurus as he traveled around, and asked each one of them whether they could tell him any messages from their dreams. Many gurus were able to see information in their dreams that would reveal what would happen in the future, or would reveal things that people could not normally see. These are called prophetic dreams. And each of the gurus Marpa visited had a prophetic dream that he would meet Naropa.

After a month of searching for Naropa, one night he dreamed that Naropa spoke to him. And the next day, when Marpa looked up at the sky, he saw Naropa's form clearly like a rainbow!



Marpa happily greeted his master, who gave him a message that he must persevere, try and try again, on and on. And suddenly Naropa disappeared from the sky, like a rainbow disappears.

Marpa ran toward the direction where he had seen Naropa in the sky, wishing to follow him and be with him again. He caught sight of Naropa's form again, and ran in the direction where he saw him. But the form disappeared. Then later, he saw a vision of Naropa in another direction. But when he ran toward it, the vision kept disappearing and moving away.

Exhausted, Marpa, cried out, "Lord, will you not, in your compassion, look at me? Will you abandon one who has no refuge? I offer my life to the Lama. Please care for me, this confused, ignorant one."

Then he looked toward a dark colored mountain, and in the moisture from the ground rising up into the air, he caught sight of Naropa again, going behind some large rocks. But again, he disappeared.

Marpa became frustrated, thinking, "How am I going to find him? The Lama isn't in any definite place, so where can I search?" From space, he heard a voice giving him a teaching. Then he looked up and saw a glimpse of Naropa. Marpa was filled with joy! But then the image disappeared again.

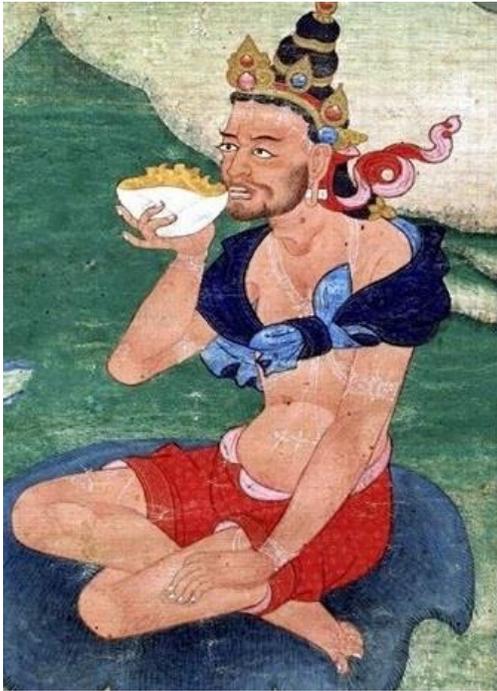


Marpa decided to walk toward the dark mountain, where he had seen the image of Naropa earlier.

On a large rock on the mountain, he saw a footprint sunk into the rock, that he recognized as the footprint of Naropa. Then he saw three more footprints.

He climbed to the top of the mountain, and prayed to Naropa to appear to him. He kept praying for seven days, staying at the top of the mountain.

And suddenly, after seven days, his Lama stood before him! He was actually there, finally! Marpa bowed to him and made offerings to him in deep gratitude.



Marpa made a very special offering of nectar, a sweet drink, offered in a skullcup – the top of a human skull made into a bowl.

Naropa drank some, and then gave the rest to Marpa.

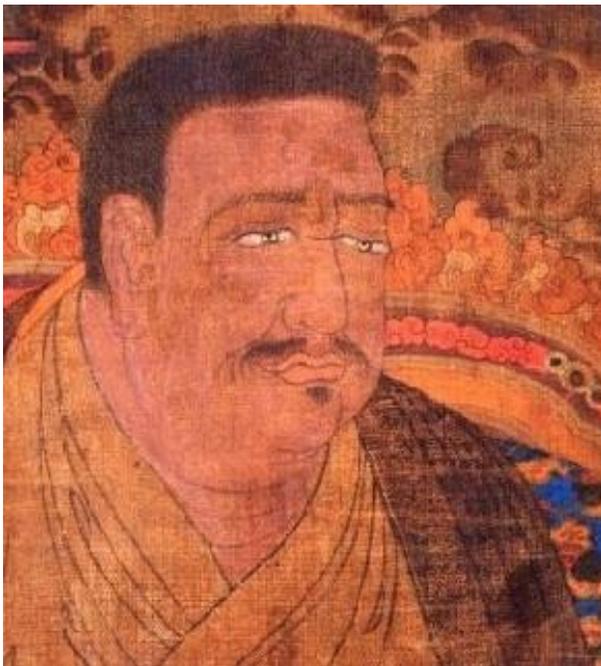
When Marpa tasted it, he experienced the wonderful taste. But then, Naropa disappeared! He had only appeared as a vision.

So Marpa kept looking for his Lama.

After a month of looking, Marpa finally found the real Naropa, just as he had experienced his Lama years ago, before Marpa had returned to Tibet. The real Lama, at last, not just a vision!

This time he offered Naropa gold from Tibet, the most precious thing he had, and asked for teachings.

But Naropa refused to accept the gold!



Marpa was confused, and offered it again.

Naropa threw it in the air, saying, "I offer this to the Lama and the Triple Gem."

Marpa felt sorry that he had offered the gold.

Gold was so valuable, and it could be used to buy anything needed. But his Lama didn't want it, and just threw it. He felt that he should not have offered the gold to his Lama. He could have used the gold to buy what was needed, and now he didn't have it anymore.

Naropa read Marpa's mind, and said, "If you need that gold, you can have it all."

With his powers, Naropa caused all the gold to appear back in his hands. But Marpa couldn't just take back the gold. That would be selfish. He already had the intention to offer it, so he

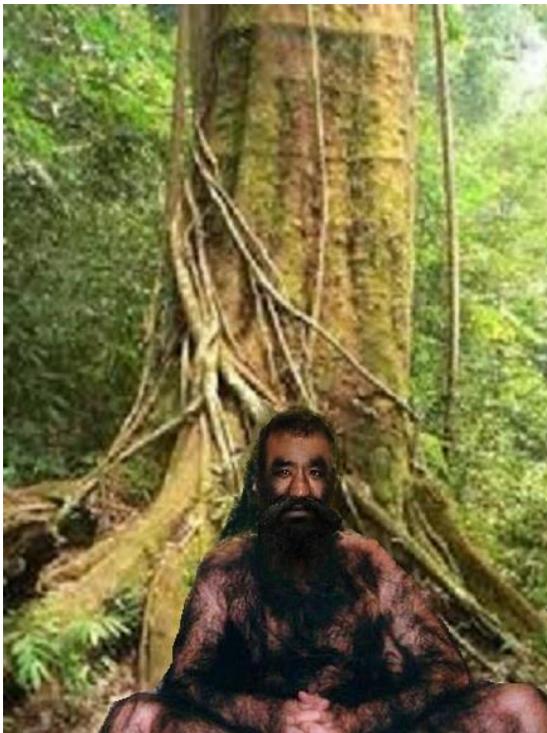
decided to offer it in another way. He took the gold dust and sprinkled it over Naropa. Some fell into Naropa's skullcup, and it became liquid, which Naropa drank. But then he disappeared!

Marpa again looked for Naropa, and found him eating barley from someone else's bowl. Naropa offered some of the barley to Marpa, and said, "Eat this." But Marpa refused to take it.

Naropa pointed out that it was not right to refuse to take the barley, a gift from his Lama, even though it appears to be of no value. Marpa learned that the value of offerings is not the worldly value of what is offered, like the value of gold in the everyday world. Instead, it is the feeling and intent with which an offering is made that is important. The loving intent, even when offering something seems worthless and that didn't even belong to the Lama, like Naropa's intent in offering the barley, was far more valuable than the gold.

Marpa then collected many Buddhist texts to translate to Tibetan and bring to his people in Tibet. But when he was in the company of his Lama, Naropa, he thought that maybe he should stay in India. Naropa read his thoughts, and said, "Return to Tibet. I and your other gurus have given our blessings. So don't wait here. Return to your country in the North where there are many people who are ready to understand the teachings.

In his two trips to India, Marpa spent a total of twenty years in India – 12 with Naropa and 7 with Maitripa. Marpa then went to each of his gurus to say goodbye.



The last guru he visited in India was Shiwa Sangpo.

Marpa sang a long song to Shiwa Sangpo, with devotion and gratitude for the empowerments and teachings he had received from this guru.

The song was so sweet and filled with devotion to the guru, that when the people sitting nearby heard it, tears came to their eyes.

Marpa traveled to the most famous river in India, the holy Ganga river. But as he crossed over it and stepped off the boat on the other shore, two robbers started following him.

Marpa was frightened, knowing that some robbers will kill a man and steal everything he has.



So he visualized his Lama, Naropa, sitting at the crown of his head.

At that moment when he visualized his Lama, the robbers couldn't see Marpa.

So, the robbers turned back and left Marpa alone.

Marpa felt boundless gratitude to all his dear gurus, and his confidence in them and his devotion to them grew.

Marpa finally reached Nepal, and saw some yogis performing a ganachakra feast. But instead of being in spiritual bliss at the feast, as Marpa had been when he offered

ganachakra feasts to his gurus, these yogis were worried.

They said, "We must hurry and finish this offering before the negative spirits come."

Marpa felt disgust at their fear and thought, "How grateful I am that I have met such a teacher as Naropa. I must return to India."

After having said goodbye to all his teachers in India, received their blessings and instructions to return to Tibet, and after his long journey to Nepal, now he wanted to go back to India and not continue to his homeland! He was worried about the long journey and many problems he could encounter on the way.

That night, he had a dream. A lady appeared in his dream, put her hand on his head, and said, "Don't return to India, but continue to Tibet. There are many people waiting who are ready to hear the teachings you have brought. You will encounter no further obstacles on your way."

So, Marpa continued his journey. Meanwhile, back in Tibet, a man from his clan, called Marpa Golek, who considered Marpa as his Lama, was anxiously awaiting Marpa's return. He had been gone so many years, Marpa Golek thought, "My Lama has still not returned. Has he passed away in India or is he coming here? If he is coming, I should go and welcome him."

So he set out and met Marpa on his journey home. Marpa was so happy and thankful to see his student, that he gave him a ruby mala (bead necklace) with 108 beads which had belonged to Naropa, and a Vajra and bell that had belonged to Maitripa.

Marpa then lived the life of a yogi in Tibet, living away from busy towns, secluded in a forest where he had a serene environment to teach his students from all the Sanskrit Indian texts that he translated into Tibetan.

One day, on his way to visit a college, he was passing by some farmers plowing a field. Marpa said to them, "Look here and see whether I have practiced bodhicitta or not."



He picked up a stone, and many ants crawled out.

When he cupped his hands, all the ants crawled into his palm, drawn by Marpa's lovingkindness.

QUESTIONS:

1. Who did all the gurus tell Marpa that he will meet again? (Naropa)
2. What did Marpa offer to all the gurus? (a ganachakra feast – offering food and organizing group chanting)
3. When Marpa was searching for Naropa, was it easy to find him? (No)
4. How did Naropa appear to Marpa at first? (in visions, in the sky, on a mountain, and footprints in the stone)
5. When he found the real Naropa, what did Marpa offer him? (gold)
6. What did Naropa do with the gold? (threw it)
7. What did Naropa offer to Marpa from someone else's bowl? (barley)
8. When Marpa was frightened by robbers, what did he do to overcome his fear? (imagine Naropa at the crown of his head)
9. How did Marpa show that he had strong bodhicitta? (ants crawled into his hands)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – GRATITUDE AND GENEROSITY:

*“Although all practitioners have a lineage, if one has the Dakini lineage, one has everything.
Although all practitioners have a grandfather, if one has Tilo, one has everything.
Although all practitioners have a Lama, if one has Naro, one has everything.”
- Marpa (GKM p. 118)*

The intent in giving is more important than what you give.

What is the best way to show your gratitude? Sometimes we say “thank you,” or we give a gift, a thank-you card, a hug or a smile when we are thankful for something. But what about if we get something very valuable, are those enough? Can we show our gratitude in a bigger way than that? When adults are thankful for their job, they work very hard for their boss. When they hear a monk teach the Dharma very well, because of their gratitude, they serve the temple in many ways, like bringing food, helping the monks, cleaning the temple, and giving donations.

What very valuable things are you grateful for? Your parents’ hard work in taking care of you, and your teachers’ hard work preparing the class for you - your teachers at school, music teachers, dance teachers, scout masters. You can be thankful to your parents that you are happy, healthy and intelligent, and to your teachers that you are gaining knowledge and skill.

What can you give them to show your gratitude? They appreciate when you learn well from them, when you show interest in what they teach, when you practice what they teach, and when you are respectful, obedient, patient, polite, and helpful. So, you can give them your attention, respect, obedience, help, and best efforts in practicing what they teach.

What else do you have that is very valuable that you can be grateful for? The Dharma! How can we show gratitude for having such a precious and special teaching? By *practicing* the Dharma – for example, by showing loving-kindness to all beings, by being kind to them and helping them however we can. That means we have to *remember* to be helpful, be *aware* of how we can help, and then offer help.

Also, we can brighten someone’s day by just smiling! People love to see a child’s smile. Sometimes people are unhappy, lonely or stressed out, and when they see you smile, it makes them feel appreciated. They remember it and feel happier. Feeling thankful for our good fortune, we can share our happiness, making others happier, with just a smile or kind words or help. It also makes *us* happy knowing that we are giving to others.

We can share what we do have and use our skills to make simple gifts. Who do we share and give gifts to? Our friends? We give birthday gifts, we share toys, and we give them our time - we spend time with them. It is fun to spend time with friends and we want friends to like us, do things for us and invite us. So we like to give to them. But, that type of giving usually has some selfishness in it - we give because we want something in return: our friend’s attention and to enjoy fun times with our friends.

What type of giving is unselfish - or selfless? Selfless giving means giving without trying to get something in return.

Young people have time and a lot of energy. They can give their time and energy to help someone without thinking about getting attention, money, or rewards of any kind. This is called "selfless service."

How can you do selfless service? At home, for your parents! You can give your time and energy to help your parents even when they don't ask for it. You may be able to find some things that your parents would like you to do at home. As the Buddha said, serving our mother and father brings happiness. How does it bring happiness? First, our parents will be happy seeing us doing things to help them without being asked. When they are happy, don't we become happier, too? Second, when we know that we are doing good actions, we know that we are doing the right thing, so we become confident. If we are often lazy and not helpful, will others be pleased with us? Probably not. Third, we are showing our gratitude by selfless service to our parents for all the good they have done for us. Fourth, good actions have good results in the future, as we know from the Law of Karma. So, selfless service may not be as much fun as being with our friends, but it gives us happiness now and in the future.

How do we know what to do to help? We can look around and see what needs to be cleaned up, put away, prepared, or set up the way our parents like it to be done. We should first offer to do it, by saying "Would you like me to . . ." to make sure they approve of what we plan to do. We can see when they are working on something, if there is something we could do to help, we can offer to help. But remember, to be selfless service we are not hoping to get any money, privileges or other treats or rewards in return.

We also can give our time and energy to do selfless service for relatives, needy people, and at the temple. We can ask our parents how we can help.

We may find out that our service is more difficult than we thought. We should keep a good giving heart and not stop just because we have some obstacle or difficulty. If needed, we can ask our parents for guidance on how to complete the job. Or we could ask someone else to help us. It is good to encourage others to do selfless service, too.

ACTIVITY

Each student writes the quotation for today on a paper, and then underneath writes about 10 or 20 numbered lines to write a list. On the lines, students list things they can do as selfless service to their parents. If students cannot fill all the lines, then when they get home, they can ask their parents to suggest some things they would like their child to do to help. Then each student hangs the list in a conspicuous place at home, such as in the kitchen, to remember what they can give to their parents.