

## THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 15 – Pride

As Milarepa traveled toward Chuwar, he arrived in a village, and sat down by the side of the road. A group of pretty young girls wearing colorful Tibetan jewelry passed by him. They felt proud of how they looked in their beautiful jewelry and clothes, with young pretty faces. Seeing Milarepa's terribly thin skeleton-like body with green skin, one of them said,



“Look! What misery! May I never be reborn as such a creature.”

Another one said, “How pitiful! A sight like that depresses me.”

Milarepa thought to himself, “I have compassion for these ignorant beings.” And, feeling pity for them, he said to them, “Daughters, do not speak in this way. There is no reason for you to be so distressed. You could not be born like me, even if you wished. It is astonishing that you feel compassion, but your compassion comes from pride and a wrong understanding. Listen to my song.” And he sang a song to them with these words:

I invoke the Compassionate Marpa, grant me your blessing.  
Sentient beings floating in their bad karma  
Show no respect to others, but only to themselves.  
Unfortunate girls, you have faith only in ordinary life.  
Your pride and wrong perception burn like fire.  
I feel pity for such immature beings.  
In these dark days of the Kali Yuga (dark age),  
Dishonest people are honored like gods.  
Hypocrites are prized more than gold  
And the faithful are rejected like stones on the road.

I have pity for such confused beings.  
You proud young girls, my sisters, and  
I, Milarepa of Gungthang,  
We are disturbing to each other.  
Let us compare our pities and by tilting the lance of compassion,  
See which will be victorious in the end.  
To those ignorant ones indulging in useless talk,  
Milarepa replies by teaching the Dharma. . . .  
He returns good for evil.

The girl who thought Milarepa looked pitiful said, "It is he who is called Milarepa! We are all full of pride. We have said many unwise things. Now, let us ask his forgiveness."

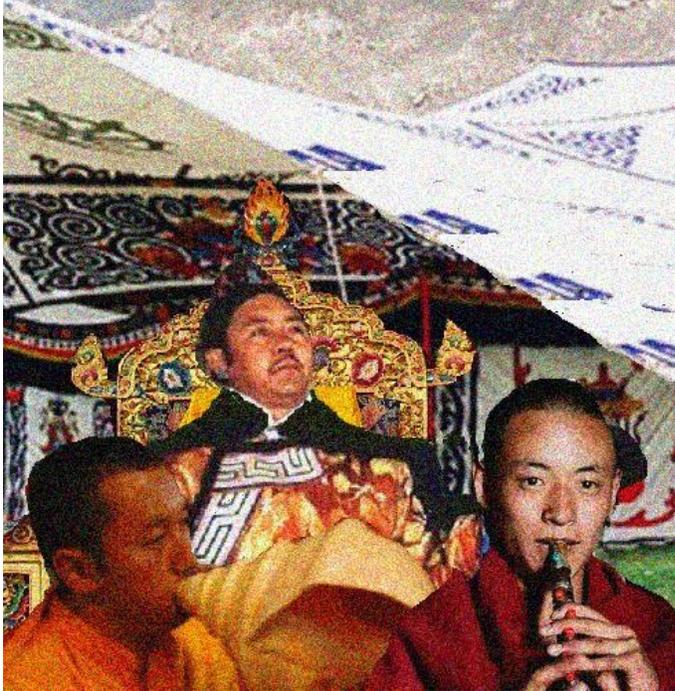
Milarepa gave special advice to that girl. She offered him seven shells, and all of the girls prostrated (bowed down on the ground) and asked for forgiveness. They asked him for instruction in Dharma. So he sang another song, which included these words:

I invoke the Compassionate Lama, I offer the sacred Dharma in a short song.  
. . . On man's Earth, false teachers are preferred; the real teachers are ignored.  
In the dark days of the Kali Yuga,  
Wicked people are preferred; the good are ignored.  
In the eyes of beautiful girls,  
The handsome man is preferred; the yogi is ignored.  
In the ears of these young girls,  
This short song sounds pleasant; the profound Dharma sounds unpleasant.  
These are my instructions in song,  
This is my response to the gift of seven shells.  
This is the celebration of your forgiveness.

The girls believed in Milarepa as a genuine and wise yogi, and then went on their way.

Milarepa went to a cave to meditate. Several months passed, and his meditation became deeper. When some people came once or twice to bring him food, he thought that having people visit him would be a distraction to his meditation, so he thought about going to a very isolated wilderness area called Lapchi, according to his lama's instructions.

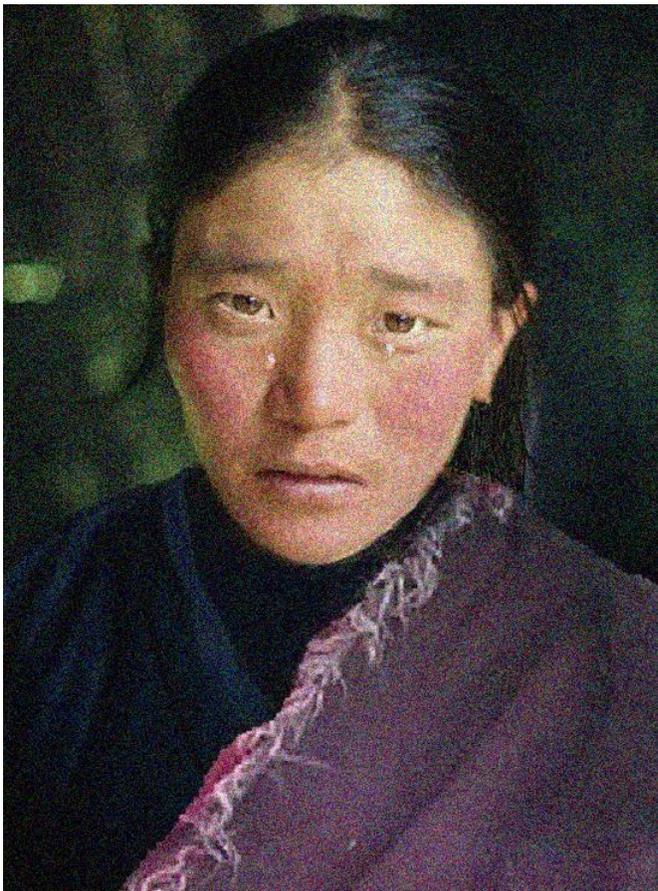
While he was thinking about leaving, his sister Peta was looking for him at the cave he had been staying before, and when she saw that he wasn't there, she walked around the area asking people whether they knew where he was. One person told her that a yogi who looked like a nettle worm had gone to a region called South Latö. Peta thought that when people see her skeleton thin brother with his green skin, they probably think he looks like a nettle worm. So she started traveling to that region.



On her way, she saw a guru called Lama Bari dressed in rich silk clothing, seated on a high throne and sheltered under a canopy. When his monks blew on the trumpets, a big crowd of men surrounded him and gave him many offerings of tea and beer.

Peta thought, "This is the way other people treat their lama. My brother's religion is one of misery, that other people look down on with contempt. Even his relatives blush with embarrassment about him. If I find my brother, I must urge him to serve this lama, and I must really convince him to do it."

She asked some of the men if they knew where Milarepa was. She was told where she could find him, and she walked until she arrived at that location.



When she found Milarepa, she said to him, "My elder brother's religion provides him with nothing to eat and nothing to wear. This is shameful and I will no longer stand for it. Make some clothes from this material that I have woven."

Thinking of Lama Bari, who was dressed in rich silk clothing, she wept as she said, "Other monks have made a throne for their lama and sheltered him under a canopy. They dress him in silk and offer him tea and beer. His monks blow trumpets, and then a large crowd of people come to greet him with gifts beyond belief. He is useful to both his followers and relatives, and satisfies their wishes. Religion of this kind is excellent. Try to see if this lama will take you into his service. Even if you were the lowest of his monks, you would be happy from now on. Otherwise, this religion of yours and my poor condition will not support our lives."

Milarepa answered, “Don’t speak like that. My lack of clothes and my unusual behavior embarrass you. But I am content with this body of mine which enabled me to find the Dharma. So I have nothing to be ashamed of. Those who knowingly, and without self-control, commit bad deeds, break their parents’ hearts. Those who live off of the lama’s wealth and the temple offerings, and those who injure other beings by their sneaky selfish ways – all these only injure themselves and others and displease the gods and holy men. They are a cause for shame in this life and the next.”



He continued, “Do you think that I meditate without food or clothing because no one will make offerings to me? It is not so. Inwardly, I feel the sufferings of life in samsara and the lower worlds, like a man fears being thrown alive into the flames. When I see how people waste their time in having fun and in Eight Worldly Reactions – so concerned about being praised, admired, being popular, being comfortable and having nice things, and so worried about being unpopular, getting criticized, losing things and suffering – that makes me feel

disgusted, like a man who gorges on food and then vomits it up. This is the reason for my renunciation, giving up the worldly life.”

He said further, “Lama Marpa instructed me to give up the Eight Worldly Reactions, to give up also food, clothing and fame. He instructed me to stay alone in one lonely place after another. And above all else to meditate with intense devotion and determination, abandoning the goals of worldly life. It is these instructions that I am carrying out. And in so doing not only do I assure the happiness of those who follow me but also lasting happiness for all other beings.”

In response to Peta’s urging that he serve Lama Bari, he said, “If I tried, not only could I join the men serving Lama Bari, but I could even become like him. But I wish to attain Enlightenment in this life, so I ardently dedicate myself to meditation. Peta, you too, give up the Eight Worldly Reactions and follow me to the snows of Lapchi to meditate! Then happiness will shine on you in this life and the next.”

Peta responded, “What you call the Eight Worldly Reactions are what people call worldly happiness. But we have no happiness to give up! Your high-sounding words are just an excuse

to hide the fact that you will never be like Lama Bari. I will not go to Lapchi to be miserable and deprive myself of food and clothing. I don't even know where Lapchi is! Rather than running away and hiding in the rocks like a deer chased by hounds, why don't you stay in one place and your practice will intensify, and also it will be easier for me to find you. People in this area seem to respect you. So, stay for a few days, even if you do not live here permanently. Make yourself some clothes from this material. I will soon return."

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the girls think that Milarepa was so miserable and depressing to look at? (because he was so thin and had green skin)
2. What were the young girls proud of? (how they looked with their beautiful jewelry and clothes, and young pretty faces)
3. What does Milarepa actually give to people when he is giving something good to them in return for their evil thoughts? (he teaches Dharma to people who have bad thoughts)
4. Did the girls admit that they were full of pride? (yes)
5. Why did Peta admire Lama Bari? (he had nice clothes, sat on a throne, and had a big crowd of devotees who gave him many offerings, and he gives them what they wish)
6. Why was Peta ashamed of Milarepa? (he had no food or clothes)
7. What did Lama Marpa tell Milarepa that he should give up? (food, clothes, fame, and the Eight Worldly Reactions)

#### DHARMA DISCUSSION – PRIDE:

*Sentient beings floating in their bad karma  
Show no respect to others, but only to themselves.  
Unfortunate girls, you have faith only in ordinary life.  
Your pride and wrong perception burn like fire.  
I feel pity for such immature beings.*

*In the eyes of these beautiful girls,  
The handsome man is preferred; the yogi is ignored.*

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa, pp. 133-134)

The girls in the story were proud of their beautiful clothes and jewelry. They way they look was very important to them. They couldn't understand why Milarepa didn't care at all about the way he looked. Peta also couldn't understand why Milarepa didn't care about how strange he looked. She wanted her brother to look proud and important, wear good clothes, and have devotees serve him with everything he needs, like Lama Bari.

Milarepa was focused on his meditation; how he looked wasn't at all important to him. He felt sorry for the girls, who waste their time focusing on their beauty and don't pay any attention to Dharma.

We all have felt proud when we have nice new clothes, new shoes, or a special expensive toy. Maybe you remember the pleasant feeling of others admiring what you have. Maybe you felt sorry for a friend who didn't have such nice things.

It isn't wrong to look beautiful or handsome, and to have nice clothes. We don't live in a cave like Milarepa; we live in society among our friends and family, so we should look neat and clean, and then we feel more self-confident.

But when we are too proud of the way we look, or if we think too much about how we look, then we feel upset if we don't look so attractive. We worry and spend a lot of time thinking about how we look, comparing ourselves with how others look, trying to look better than others, looking in the mirror, taking selfie photos, making sure people notice and admire us. Focusing on our looks leads to showing off, trying to get attention, being self-centered. It leads to conceit or arrogance when you feel better looking than another person, and jealousy when you feel that another person is better looking than you are.

But true beauty comes from *inner* beauty, from having strong virtues, like compassion. When people have *inner* beauty, they have a smile that makes you happy and want to smile back. Their eyes sparkle with peace and friendliness, and their face glows with happiness.

Someone who only has *outer* beauty has a beautifully formed face, but it may often look arrogant, angry, jealous, gloomy, bored, mischievous, insecure, or not genuine. Their smile may look fake or impish, or may look like a smirk. People with outer beauty may be popular, but if they don't have strong virtues, they don't have inner beauty.

What if we have a talent, or we are good at doing something, should we be proud of ourselves? For example, when we get a better score, we are faster, more skilled, or know more than someone else? We get attention and rewards when we do something well, which makes us happy. The world is full of competition, where we get rewarded when we do better than others.

But we become too proud, or conceited, when we focus too much on comparing ourselves to others, when we often try to prove that we are better than someone else, when we show off, or when we try to make others jealous.

Being conceited means we think we know everything better, when we often think we're better than everyone else, or when we don't want to notice or admit the success of others. For example, if someone wins, we think he cheated, that others helped him or the score was unfair.

How can we avoid becoming too proud, or arrogant?

By developing humility. That means remembering that we are not perfect, and that we are interdependent on others. Many other people, such as our parents, teachers, friends and family members, have helped us in some ways to be successful.

Remembering to be thankful to others who have helped you.

And remembering that everyone has their own talents and skills, that everyone experiences successes and failures in life, that we all have successful days and unsuccessful days.

Remembering that nothing is permanent, and what we have today may be gone tomorrow.

It is better to compare ourselves with the way we were before rather than to compare ourselves with others.

For example, it is better to think that we have improved, rather than thinking that we did better than someone else.

## ACTIVITY - Attitude Test:

Students consider whether the answers describe how they might think or act, then circle the answer that is the most noble way to think. Teacher then discusses different answers, explaining why one is humble and how other answers are, or could be, arrogant/competitive/falsely humble, or neutral.

1. When I get a toy that I really like, I:

- (a) show it to my friends so they can see it
- (b) show it to my friends so they can share it
- (c) share it and remember that it will not always keep me happy

2. When I get an excellent score on a difficult test, I:

- (a) somehow let other students know my score
- (b) think about how I have improved my study habits
- (c) find out what other students' scores were

3. When I get an award, I:

- (a) think about all the people who helped me and taught me
- (b) want to tell my friends about it
- (c) know I deserved it

4. When I win or do well in a competition, I:

- (a) look forward to the next competition and want to win that, too
- (b) remember that everyone has different talents, we all win some and lose some
- (c) pretend it was no big deal

5. When I know I am good at doing something, I:

- (a) keep practicing it so I can improve
- (b) want to teach it to others
- (c) am thankful to those who helped me learn and I want to teach it to others

6. When others admire me and like my company, I:

- (a) think that I am more popular than someone I know
- (b) try to become more popular
- (c) know that popularity is just temporary, not as important as good character