

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 11 – Sadness and Anger

Milarepa arrived in his village very quickly - in only 3 days – by his yogic power. As he approached his village, he saw some men with their herds of yaks and sheep. Milarepa didn't want them to know who he was, that he was the one who caused his aunt's house to burn down and caused the hailstorm that ruined the food supply for the village. So he pretended not to know the village. He pointed to his old house, asking the men,



“That place down there, what is it called? What is the owner's name?”

One of the men replied, “That house is called Four Columns and Eight Beams. It has no living owner, only a ghost.”

Milarepa asked, “Are the owners dead or have they left the village?”

The man replied, “At one time the master of this house was one of the wealthiest men in the area. He died young, leaving an only son, who was a child. Because the man made his will unwisely, the relatives took all the son's property. When the son grew up, to punish them for taking his wealth, he brought bad luck on the village by casting spells and sending hailstorms.”

Milarepa said, “Perhaps the people are afraid of the son's protective spirit, and dare not even look at the house and field, let alone go in there.”

The man explained more to Milarepa, “The house contains the mother's dead body and is haunted by her ghost. The daughter abandoned the mother's body and disappeared, no one knows where. The son is either dead or lost. It is said there is a holy book in the house. Yogi, if you dare, go and see for yourself.”

Milarepa asked, “How long ago did that happen?”

“The mother died about 8 years ago,” the man answered.

Milarepa thought that the villagers would not dare to harm him, because they would be afraid of his spirit protector. But knowing that his mother was dead and his sister had wandered away filled him with sadness. Crying, he hid himself and waited until the evening. When it was dark, he went into the village.

The house looked like in his dream. The house and his field were overgrown with weeds.



Rain and dirt had fallen on the holy books. Rats and mice had made nests there, covering the books with their droppings.

At this sight, Milarepa's heart was filled with sadness.

There was a bad smell from the mouse and rat droppings.

He brushed the dirt and droppings off of the books.

He entered the main room. The hearth, where his mother had cooked their meals, was in ruins - crumbled, like a pile of dirt, with weeds in it.



Then he saw bones, laying in a tangle. A human skeleton.

He realized that these were the bones of his mother. He could recognize her teeth.

He remembered his mother speaking softly to him, singing, and crying. All those years she struggled and worked so hard to make sure that he and his sister had something to eat, something to wear. All those times he depended on her for everything.

He became choked with emotion. Overcome with grief, he almost fainted.

Then he remembered his lama's instructions. He could bring his mind together with his mother's mind, and with the minds of the Kagyu lamas – Marpa, Naropa and Tilopa.

He sat on his mother's bones and meditated without being distracted even for a moment. He wanted to liberate his father and mother from the cycle of birth and death. After seven days, he came out of his meditation.

He thought about how life is so unsatisfying, and then we all must die one day. He made a plan to honor the bones of his mother. He would offer someone the holy books in exchange for making the bones into statues. Then, with extremely strong intention, he decided to dedicate himself to meditation all day and all night for the rest of his life and to kill himself if he failed. He repeated this terrible promise again and again from the depths of his heart.

He gathered the bones of his mother and the books. He carried the books on his back, and he carried the bones of his mother in the folds of his chuba (robe). Carrying the bones, and overcome with extreme sorrow, he promised to dedicate himself to the Dharma and meditate at Horse Tooth White Rock.

He went to the home of the teacher who had taught him to read so many years ago. He found out that the teacher had died, but he met with the son of the teacher. He offered one of the books to the son, and requested him to make tsa-tsas, small statues from the bones of his mother. The teacher's son said,

"Your protective spirits will stay with the book, so I don't want it. But I will help you make the statues."

Milarepa said, "My protective spirits won't stay with my gifts. I offer it as a gift to you."

Then the son agreed, and he and Milarepa made statues with the bones. They performed a ceremony to honor Milarepa's mother, White Jewel. Then Milarepa prepared to leave. But the teacher's son pleaded,

"Stay here for a few days and talk, and I will take care of all your needs."

Milarepa answered, "I have no time for talk. I want to meditate."

The teacher's son said, "Then stay tonight. Tomorrow when you leave I will give you food and supplies."

Milarepa agreed to stay the night. The teacher's son was anxious to talk. He said,

"When you were young, you destroyed your enemies by magic. Now, you talk about a Dharma which is marvelous. Someday you will become a great saint. Which lama gave you teachings, and what were the teachings?"

Milarepa answered, "I got the teaching of the Great Perfection. But even better, I met Marpa."

The man exclaimed, "That is amazing! If that is so, it would be good if you were to repair your house, marry Zessay, and continue in the footsteps of your lama."



Milarepa answered in a serious tone, "The Lama Marpa took a wife for the benefit of sentient beings. But I don't have the intention or the ability to act as he does. I would be like a rabbit trying to be a lion. I am saddened by the cycle of birth and death, so I wish for nothing except to meditate and obey the teachings of the lama. He says that this meditation should be practiced alone, away from other people. This is the way I will continue on the path of Dharma. Only by meditation can I do what he hopes for me to do."

Milarepa said further, "It can help all sentient beings, and will even save my mother and father. I only know how to meditate, and I can do nothing else. I have no other plan. I came back to my village mostly because my parents owned a house and property here. The disappearance of all my worldly goods has intensified my wish to meditate, until it is like a flame burning in my chest."

He continued, "Other people have not experienced such misfortune. For those people who don't think about the suffering of death and the suffering in the lower worlds, enjoying the pleasures of life is all they want. As for myself, all these things make me want to meditate without even thinking about food, clothing, or attention from other people."

He sang a song about how the loss of his father, mother and sister, his family's flocks of sheep, their house, and their field for growing crops, all have pulled him toward a life of meditation.

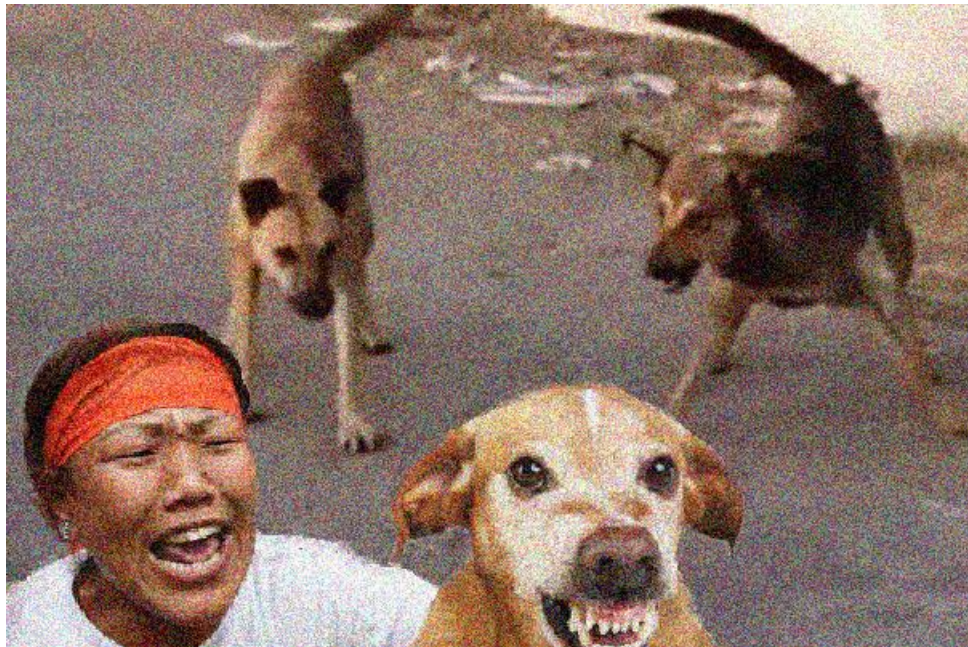


The next day, the teacher's son gave Milarepa a bag of barley flour and some excellent dried meat. Milarepa went to a cave on the hill behind his house to meditate.

He ate only a little of the meat and cooked with a little of the flour each day, just enough to stay alive, so he could meditate for months without having to find food again. But after some time his body became weak with so little food.

Finally, he had eaten all the food and he had nothing left to eat. He couldn't wait much longer to get food. He decided to go and beg for food from the local farmers and people who tended flocks of sheep and yaks. He approached the entrance to a nearby tent and called out,

“Please give a yogi some food.”



The woman in the tent recognized Milarepa. It was his aunt! She immediately commanded her dogs to attack Milarepa. They barked ferociously and snapped at him.

Milarepa threw stones at them to chase them away, and pushed them away with a stick

that he used for walking in the mountains. They stopped trying to snap at him but continued growling and barking. His aunt grabbed a tent pole and shouted at him,

“Disgraceful son of a noble father! Dishonor to your family! Destroyer-demon of your village! Why have you come here? Such a son – born to such a good father!”

She jabbed the tent pole at him. Milarepa stepped back, but because he was so starving and weak, he tripped over a stone and fell into a pool of water. Milarepa felt as if he were nearly dead, but his aunt continued to curse him. He got up as best he could, leaning on the stick, and sang a song to her, bowing in his mind to his lama, Marpa.

He sang that she should remember that it was she and the uncle who separated him and his family, that he found his mother dead from poverty and sadness and his sister wandering away to beg, and that sadness and bitterness overflowed in his heart. He sang that his grief led him to the Dharma, and while meditating he had not enough food, so he went out to beg, yet she sent a ferocious dog to welcome him, and her curses and evil words caused his heart to overflow with unhappiness. He sang that she hit him with a tent pole and nearly killed him, and

that although he has cause for anger, he will fulfill the teachings of the lama. He sang to her that she should forget her anger, and give him supplies so he can meditate. He asked his lama to bless him and calm his anger.

The song made his aunt feel ashamed. A young girl nearby was crying as she heard the song. The aunt sent the girl to Milarepa to offer him butter and a partly spoiled piece of cheese.



Then Milarepa went to beg for more food from other tents. He didn't know any of the people in the tents, but everyone knew who he was and looked at him curiously, giving him a lot of food. Then Milarepa left quickly.

He knew that his uncle would treat him the same as his aunt, so he tried to avoid going where the uncle might be. But while begging for food from other people in the valley, when he arrived at one of the houses, his uncle opened the door.

Even though Milarepa looked extremely thin and half dead, his uncle recognized him and shouted,

"Ah, you are just the one I wanted to see!" And he threw a large stone at him, nearly hitting him.

Milarepa ran away, and the uncle with all his strength continued throwing stones at him. Then the uncle got out his bow and arrow, and shouted,

"Freak of a son! A disgrace to your family! Haven't you caused the ruin of your village?"

Then he shouted to other villagers, "We have now got hold of our enemy. Come quickly!" He shot arrows at Milarepa. Some young men threw stones at Milarepa.

Milarepa decided to threaten them, as he feared they may do something terrible to him because of the black magic he had done in the past. He cried out,

"Father Lamas of the Kagyu Lineage! O you ocean of protective spirits, drinkers of blood! The Dharma-practicing yogi is surrounded by enemies. Come to my rescue!"
And to the villagers he said, "I may die, but my protective spirits cannot die."

Terrified, the men grabbed his uncle and stopped attacking Milarepa. The stone throwers asked for forgiveness, and brought Milarepa offerings. But the uncle refused to give anything. Milarepa decided to leave the area, as it would aggravate them more if he stayed.

That night, he had a dream that he would experience a happy event if he stayed there for a few days. So he stayed a little while longer.

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Milarepa find in his house? (his mother's skeleton and holy books covered with dirt and mouse and rat droppings)
2. From the sadness of his mother having died and his sister having wandered away, and the loss of his house and of all his worldly goods, what did Milarepa want to do for the rest of his life? (meditate)
3. Why didn't Milarepa agree with the teacher's son's suggestion that he should repair his house and marry Zessay? (Marpa had instructed him to meditate alone, and he only knows how to meditate)
4. How did Milarepa find his aunt? (he went to beg for food at a tent)
5. What did his aunt accuse him of? (being a demon, destroying the village, dishonoring his family)
6. How did Milarepa finally stop his aunt from attacking him? (he sang a song explaining what she had done and how he felt)
7. How did Milarepa stop his uncle from attacking him? (called out to the Kagyu lamas and protective spirits to rescue him and scared his uncle by saying that his protective spirits won't die)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – SADNESS AND ANGER:

"The words of my aunt are words of anger; were I to speak the same language, we would destroy one another."

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa p. 115)

"Although I have a good cause for anger, I shall fulfill the teachings of the lama."

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa, p. 109)

Milarepa felt sad when he saw his house in ruins and his mother's dead body, and when he heard his sister had wandered away.

He felt the loss and grief of missing his mother and sister. He felt the sadness of seeing his house and field in ruins.

He could have felt extreme anger toward his aunt and uncle for causing all this loss, for causing his mother to suffer and die, and his sister to wander away and have to beg to survive.

He could have let feelings of anger and revenge build up, and he could have been so angry that he would harm his aunt and uncle.

But he didn't. He followed Dharma, by not letting the negative emotion of anger build up.

He asked his lama to calm his anger.

He allowed himself to feel sadness of loss, and this sadness reminded him of impermanence, that everything must change, and disappear one day.

And this is one of the four thoughts that turn the mind toward the Dharma.

He felt more determined to follow Dharma, to practice meditation, when he experienced the sadness and loss.

So, feeling sadness and grief can be helpful to motivate us to follow and practice Dharma.

But anger can lead us away from Dharma if we let it build up in our minds.

Milarepa's aunt and uncle let their anger toward Milarepa grow so much that they hated him, shouted and cursed him, attacked him, and wanted to harm or kill him.

Letting negative emotions like anger, hatred, revenge, jealousy and ill-will grow in our minds makes us say and do things that harm others.

That increases our negative karmas and causes us to suffer even more, and feel bitter, depressed, and even more angry.

We must learn the difference between sadness and anger.

Sadness for others is when we want to help or comfort someone, feeling compassion.

Sadness within ourselves is feeling grief, missing someone we love, losing what we love, maybe also feeling lonely.

We feel anger when we feel frustrated that something isn't fair, that someone won't listen to us, or won't do what we want.

We feel anger when we want to control someone or something.

Like when we are afraid that something may happen that we don't want.

Anger is a strong emotion that can make us want to do something destructive, revengeful, to hurt or insult someone.

It can get out of control, like Milarepa's aunt and uncle, and become rage - very destructive!

Anger is helpful when we use it in a limited way to protect ourselves, or another person or animal from harm.

The wrathful deities use their anger, which is actually extreme compassion for us, to motivate us to act according to Dharma, and to protect us.

But we should be careful not to let our anger get out of control, leading us away from Dharma.

Sometimes people admire a person's anger – it makes them look powerful or confident.

But it is more admirable and persuasive to speak in a way that is assertive and strong, calm, cool and confident, than in a way that is irritable and hot-tempered.

A person who can control his anger is much more powerful than a person who can't control it!

So, we must learn to control our anger.

How do we control it?

First, notice when you are angry. Say it to yourself when you feel it – “I feel angry”

It's okay to feel anger – and it is good to admit to ourselves when we feel angry.

The more you notice when you are angry – maybe just a little angry – annoyed, frustrated, irritated – then the easier it is to learn to calm your anger.

Second, use a method to calm your anger. The more often you can calm your anger, the faster your anger will disappear in the future whenever you get angry. Here are some methods:

Drink a glass of cool water – for an immediate distraction from anger.

Practice mindfulness. Take deep breaths, notice all the sensations of breathing in, breathing out.

Be like a scientist. Observe what your body is feeling – is your heart going faster? Are you breathing faster? Is your stomach tense? Are you moving restlessly? Do you feel discomfort? How many minutes do you think you will feel angry? Give yourself a few minutes, and then after that, you're done being angry, because you don't want to feel angry anymore.

Remember anger is impermanent - Let your anger go away quickly, don't let it ruin your day!

Remember everyone is the owner of their karma

If someone was unfair to you, or unkind, try to avoid feeling revengeful. Don't think about how you can get them back.

Instead, remember that they will suffer the results of their own karma. It will be automatic.

A person hurts another because he himself is feeling bad. So he wants others to feel bad too.

So have compassion for him, because he is feeling bad.

Maybe someone was unfair or disrespectful to you because you were unfair or disrespectful in your past, maybe in a past life.

If you don't react with angry words or actions, this is good karma for you!

But it's okay to let them know you don't like what they said or did.

If you are angry at someone, saying angry words to them won't help. It only makes them angrier, and they may try even more to hurt you.

Instead, have compassion for them, because they haven't learned how to avoid hurting others, and they will have to suffer the results of their karmas.

Think of the person's good qualities - Try to think of any good qualities about the person you are angry at, or think of some good things that they did, or good skills that they have.

Chant a mantra - Think of Tara and chant one of her mantras, or recite “Om Mani Padme Hum” and think of Chenrezig. You can chant out loud or in your mind.

Ask your lama or yidam deity to calm your anger – like Milarepa did in the story

Think about why you are angry

Usually, if you think about it carefully, anger arises because of fear. There is something that you are afraid of.

So, begin to analyze where the anger came from:

Who made you angry? What did they do to make you angry?

What is it that you don't like?

What is it that you want that you don't have?

What might happen, that you don't want to happen?

Then you might find that you are angry because you are afraid someone might harm you, embarrass you, or take something from you.

Or you are afraid of losing something, not getting something you need, or of something bad happening.

Take a walk – in fresh air, in nature. Notice some beautiful things around you. Walk away from those who are bothering you.

Exercise – for example, jump rope, basketball, play with a soccer ball, skateboard.

Take a nap - sometimes after resting you feel better.

Take a shower - cleaning the body helps clean the mind.

Listen to music – it relaxes you, helps make your emotions more positive.

Journaling – write down your thoughts, only for yourself - you can throw it away later.

ACTIVITY

Make a poster showing many ways that you can calm your anger.