

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 3 – Fear and Karma

Milarepa's uncle was full of hatred toward Milarepa and his mother, who had caused the deaths of 35 people, including his sons, as his house was being destroyed by Milarepa's magic. He wanted to kill Milarepa's mother, White Jewel. People in the village told him, "It is because you didn't keep your word in the past that this terrible thing has happened." They also said, "If you kill the mother before killing the son, we will be against you." The villagers planned to murder Milarepa, the one who actually caused the 35 people to die.

The brother of White Jewel was disappointed in his sister's reaction to the people getting killed, her shouting with joy of revenge. He went to visit her, and said, "After how you behaved yesterday, the neighbors are ready to kill you and your son. Why did you shout about your vengeance? Wasn't it enough for you that the spell worked?"

White Jewel replied, "Well, bad luck didn't fall on *you*. I understand what you're saying, but after the way they stole all my things, it's very difficult to just keep silent." And then she cried.

Her brother said, "It is true. You are right. But killers may come, so lock yourself in." And then he left.

White Jewel sold the rest of her land in exchange for seven ounces of gold. She wanted to bring food and supplies to Milarepa, and warn him of the neighbors' plan to kill him, and give him advice. But she couldn't trust anyone in the village to travel with her or bring anything to him.

Soon afterward, a yogi arrived at her door begging for food. That gave her an idea. She asked him to stay with her a few days. She wanted him to carry a message to Milarepa.



She offered to patch the yogi's worn out cloak, and then she secretly sewed the gold inside the cloak, with a patch. On the dark colored patch she sewed a pattern with white thread that looked like the star constellation called the Pleiades.

She asked him to travel to Milarepa and bring a message to him. He agreed, and she paid him for his efforts. So he left on a journey to visit Milarepa.

She then thought about what she should do about the neighbors. She was afraid that at any moment, someone could come and kill her.

She thought, how can I protect myself At any time someone could come and kill me. Then she thought of a plan.

She decided to write a letter that seems like it came from Milarepa, that would threaten the neighbors with powerful magic spells and make them afraid of him.

She wrote a letter that said:

“Surely my mother and sister are in good health and have seen signs of the magic that has taken place. If certain neighbors hate you, send me their names and their families’ names. It would be as easy for me to kill them by magic spells as it is to throw a pinch of food in the air. So, I will destroy them and their children, and their children’s children, to the ninth generation. Mother, and sister, if the people of the village are still hostile to you, come and join me here. I will destroy every trace of this village. Although I am alone, I have wealth and everything I need. Don’t worry about me.”



Then she folded the letter and showed it to her brother and his friends, and left it with him to show to others.

And sure enough, her brother showed it to someone else, who told his friends and family. The word spread through the village, as others told their neighbors and friends, and soon everyone in the village knew about the letter.

The letter scared the villagers, so they changed their minds about trying to kill Milarepa and White Jewel. They were worried that maybe he would kill them first! So they gave back to White Jewel the land that the uncle had taken away from her.

Meanwhile, the yogi arrived at the place where Milarepa was staying, and gave him the letter that White Jewel had written. The letter said:

“I hope, Good News, that you are in good health. Signs of your magic have appeared in the village and 35 people have been killed in the house that collapsed. As a result of this, the local people have ill-will toward us, and that is why you must make hail fall from the sky, and it must be a lot of hail! Then the last wishes of me, your old mother, will be fulfilled. The people of the neighborhood say that they will find you and kill you, and then kill me. Let us guard our lives

with the greatest care. If your supplies are low, look in the north, where, against a dark cloud, the constellation of the Pleiades will appear. Under it are seven houses where there are all the supplies you could wish for. Take them.”

Milarepa read the letter, but he didn't understand what his mother meant by the dark cloud and the constellation of Pleiades. He asked the yogi if he knew what it meant, but he also didn't know. He missed his home and his mother, and his supplies were very low – he had very little food left, and no relatives in the area from whom to ask for food.

Milarepa showed his mother's letter to the magician lama, Ocean of Virtues, who had taught him the powerful and destructive magic. Milarepa asked him to explain the letter. The lama looked at the letter and said, “Good News, your mother is filled with hatred. Even after the death of so many people, she now wants you to send hailstorms.” He didn't explain anything else.

Just then the lama's wife, who was very wise, walked in, and read the letter aloud. She said, “Send the yogi in here.”

She served the yogi some beer, and made a big fire so everyone would feel very warm. Then she walked up to the yogi and casually removed the cloak from his back, because he might be too warm. She put it on herself, and said, “This is a nice cloak for traveling around.” She walked out to the terrace, and when she was hidden from view, she removed the gold from under the patch, and quickly sewed the patch back on. She gave the cloak back to the yogi, and served him dinner.

Then she went to Milarepa when the yogi was busy eating, and gave Milarepa the gold. He asked, “Where did this gold come from?”

She answered, “It was hidden in the yogi's cloak. Good News, your mother is very careful. In the letter, she wrote to look to the north. That is where the sun doesn't shine – that means the cloak of the yogi that the sun cannot shine through. The dark cloud means the patch. The constellation of the Pleiades are the stars on the patch. And under it are the seven houses – meaning the seven ounces of gold.”

The lama said, “You women! They say women are very crafty. It is true!” And he laughed.

Milarepa gave a little of the gold to the yogi and the lama's wife, and gave a large piece to the lama, Ocean of Virtues. Milarepa said, “You see that my old mother is also asking for a hailstorm. Please find it in your heart to teach me.”

The lama answered, “If you want hailstorms, go and find Terrifying Conqueror. And he gave Milarepa a letter and some gifts for his magician friend.

Milarepa then went back to Terrifying Conqueror, from whom he had first learned magic, and laid at his feet almost half of the gold his mother had sent, along with the letter and gifts from Ocean of Virtues. Milarepa explained why he wanted to learn to make hailstorms.

Terrifying Conqueror asked, "Have you succeeded in making magic?"

Milarepa said, "I have been completely successful, and through magic, 35 people have been killed. Now, in addition, this letter from my mother asks for hailstorms. Please find it in your heart to teach me."

The lama replied, "Very well. So be it." And he gave the secret formula.

Milarepa went back to his hut that he had built earlier to perform magic, and began chanting the hailstorm formula.



On the seventh day of practicing, a cloud appeared inside the hut.

Lightening flashed and thunder rumbled from it. He heard a voice. Maybe it was a spirit of magic.

Milarepa thought, "Now I can call forth hail from my fingertip!"

The magician lama came to the hut and asked Milarepa,

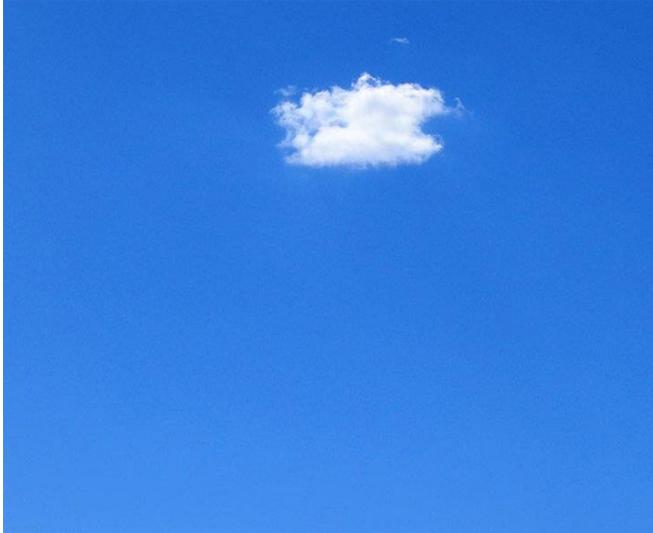
"So that we know when to send the hail, how high would the wheat have grown in your village by now?"

Milarepa replied, "It is just sprouting." Milarepa kept practicing the formula day after day, week after week. Many weeks later the lama visited him and asked again how high the wheat would be. Milarepa replied, "The wheat is just beginning to bend over," the lama said, "Then it is time to send the hailstorm."

He gave Milarepa his messenger to travel with, and they dressed as wandering monks and walked toward the village where White Jewel, his sister, and their relatives lived.

In the village, the crops had grown extremely well, and the villagers were looking forward to a good harvest. When Milarepa arrived, they were planning to harvest the wheat the next day.

Milarepa and the messenger then camped on a nearby mountain. Milarepa started chanting the formula.



A little cloud appeared and drifted in the clear blue sky.

But it was so small! Only about the size of a bird!

He was disappointed. Was that all that he could do?

Then he called out the spirits of magic by name.

He remembered how terribly his uncle and aunt had treated him, his mother and sister. He grew more and more angry. He threw off his cloak, and began to cry out in anger.

Then, unbelievably huge black clouds suddenly gathered in the sky. As far as he could see, everything was under the shadow of the thick black clouds.





The clouds gathered together into a big thick mass of darkness.

In an instant, hailstones - balls of ice - fell out of the clouds and onto the wheat that was just ready to be harvested.



As the balls of ice fell out of the sky, they pelted the wheat so the stalks broke and bent over.

The weight of the ice flattened the stalks to the ground.

The hail kept falling, on and on, covering the whole valley in ice.

The villagers watched in horror and disbelief.

It was like their worst nightmare.

The wheat harvest was totally ruined.

What would they eat for the winter?



They had never seen such hail before. Such large balls of hail, falling so fiercely, and for so long, covering everything in a thick blanket of ice.

The villagers could do nothing but cry out in anguish.

It began to dawn on them, how this hailstorm could have suddenly erupted from a clear blue sky. It was Milarepa, with his black magic! Now the whole village would have no bread or barley to eat for the whole winter.

Some men who had been out hunting felt such extreme hatred toward Milarepa, that they thought of how much they want to kill and butcher him.

They happened to pass by the cave where Milarepa and the messenger were staying. One of the men said, "Silence! Silence! There is smoke coming out of that cave. Who can that be?"

Another said, "Surely that is Good News. He has not seen us. If we don't kill him soon, he will surely destroy the whole region!" They started to walk back toward the cave.

The messenger whispered to Milarepa, "Leave ahead of me. I'll pretend that I am you. I'll tell them when I leave that this is my revenge. We'll meet again after a four day journey to the west where the travelers meet."

Even though he was alone after Milarepa left, the messenger was fearless, knowing his strength. The hunters surrounded him. Yet he was a great runner and he ran as fast as he could, breaking through their circle, and escaped. They ran after him, but he ran much faster. When he was well ahead of them, they shot arrows at him, and with all his strength he hurled large stones back at them.

He shouted, "I will lay a curse on whoever ventures against me. How many men have I already killed for revenge? And now what about your beautiful harvest which has disappeared? Is this not also my revenge? That being so, if you are not good to my mother and sister, I will lay a curse on your whole region from the top of the valley to the bottom. Those who aren't killed will be destroyed to the ninth generation. If death and desolation don't strike this country, it won't be my fault. Wait and see! Wait and see!"

He moved away. The hunters didn't want to take any blame for causing Milarepa to destroy everything. They began to accuse each other. "It was all your fault," one said. "No, it was your fault!" another said. Quarreling among each other, they turned back.

Milarepa and the messenger later met each other, and traveled back to the magician lama, Terrifying Conquerer, who looked joyfully at them and said, "Well, you two, you have done good work!"

QUESTIONS:

1. How did White Jewel scare the villagers so they wouldn't attack her? (wrote a letter that looks like it came from Milarepa, threatening to kill them by magic spells if they are hostile to her)
2. What magic spell did she want Milarepa to do next? (send a hailstorm to the village)
3. How did she send a letter to Milarepa, asking him to send the hailstorm? (paid a yogi to go visit him)
4. How did White Jewel send gold to Milarepa? (sewed it under a patch in the cloak of the yogi, and gave clues in the letter where to find it)
5. What happened when Milarepa first started chanting the hailstorm formula? (a very small cloud appeared)
6. What did Milarepa remember just before the big black clouds appeared? (how his uncle and aunt treated him and his family)
7. What emotions did he feel at that moment? (anger, revenge)

DISCUSSION – FEAR AND KARMA:

*"You perform negative actions, inflicting harm and difficulties.
This is so because you've paid no heed to cause and effect.
Now, contemplate the faults of samsara.
Completely abandon the ten non-virtuous deeds.
I am a yogi who is like a lion,
I have no fear or apprehension."*

- Milarepa (The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, Transl. by Christopher Stagg, p. 49)

How did White Jewel feel about the neighbors after the 35 people were killed? Fear. Her fear of being killed is what made her write the letter that she pretended came from Milarepa, threatening to kill them by magic spells.

Did her plan work? Yes, they changed their minds about killing her and Milarepa, and gave her back the land that the uncle had taken.

When a person is afraid of someone, they may try to scare them by threatening to harm them. The messenger was afraid that the hunters would kill him and Milarepa, so he threatened to put a curse on them, a magic spell to cause death and destruction. And that plan worked too – the hunters began quarrelling and left the messenger alone.

White Jewel and the messenger were not only afraid, they were full of hatred and revenge. Their hatred and revenge actually cause them to have fear. When we know we have done wrong things – we have created bad karma - then we have more fear. We know deep inside that when we have done very wrong things, it is more likely that bad things will happen to us - the results of karma will come sooner or later.

Even people who don't believe in karma have a guilty conscience when they know they have mistreated others. It causes more stress, more worry, more feeling of the need to protect themselves.

The Buddha teaches that no evil happens to those people who do no evil acts. He compares this to a person whose hand is protected by healthy skin, who can hold poison in his hand but not be poisoned. The poison cannot get inside the body because the skin protects it. What happens if a person has a wound on his hand and holds poison in it? He will be easily poisoned. The poison can seep through the weak part of the skin – the wound - and into his bloodstream and the person suffers and may die.

Similarly, if we have weak character - having hatred, greed, envy, anger, revenge, selfishness, or other negative attitudes - then evil done by others can badly affect us. For example, someone who has weak character will have very hateful thoughts, words or behavior if someone does something unfair to them. And that causes more trouble.

Someone who has good character might say that was unfair and try to correct it, but doesn't speak or act with hatred. He has compassion that the other person may have made a mistake, or that the person's misbehavior is due to his negative karmas. He doesn't get so upset.

The Dharma protects us - the more we follow Dharma, the less evil can affect us.

If we are really practicing Dharma, not doing any bad acts and not saying unkind things, then we don't have to be afraid of bad things happening to us.

Why? Because we are protected by the Dharma, by our good acts, words and thoughts.

But, we will have to suffer the results of our bad deeds in *past* lives.

We can endure them with courage, knowing that we are not doing any more bad deeds in this life, and that we have a great and happy future.

ACTIVITY – SHARING OUR FEARS:

Sitting in a circle, each person shares his or her biggest fear. Acknowledge that everyone has fears, and discuss how we might be able to overcome each fear. If someone has a fear of spiders or snakes, discuss the favorable and beautiful aspects of spiders and snakes, perhaps looking at photos of them. If someone has a fear of taking exams, or other activity, discuss chanting a mantra to feel protected.

Meditation to reduce fear: Visualize a prayer wheel in your heart, and chant "Om Mani Padme Hum." Imagine the mantra makes a soothing light energy inside the whole body, then it makes a blanket or cocoon wrapped around the body, then it surrounds everyone in the room, in the building, in the city, in the country, on the earth, all sentient beings, . . . may all beings feel the soothing, peaceful, purifying energy of the mantra.