

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 6 – Self Restraint

One day, a powerful, well-known man came with his friends to Marpa to request a special initiation. Dakmema, Marpa's wife, feeling sad about how hard Milarepa had worked on building four towers, thought this might be an opportunity, so she said to Milarepa,

“Now, try by any means to obtain the teaching.”

Milarepa thought, “Now that I've built this tower without anyone else bringing a single stone – not even one stone the size of a goat's head – and not even a single basket of earth, a single bucket of water, or a single shovel-full of mortar, I am going to receive the initiation.”

Then he went to greet Marpa, and sat down with the other students, including the powerful, well-known man.

Marpa called out to Milarepa, “Great Magician, what gift do you bring me?”

Milarepa answered, “I gave you my respects by building the tower for your son. You promised to give me initiation and instruction. That's why I am here.”



“You made a little tower which isn't even as thick as my arm. It is hardly worth the Teachings which I, with great difficulty, brought all the way from India. If you have the price of my teaching, give it to me. Otherwise, do not stay here among those who I initiate into the secret teaching.”

And then, as if his words were not bad enough, Marpa slapped Milarepa, grabbed him by the hair, and threw him out! Milarepa wanted to die right there and then. He went to his room and wept.

For hours, he just wept. He thought about his hopes for receiving the teachings during all the time he was carefully building the three towers and taking them apart, stone by stone. He thought of all the careful work he did to build a perfect, beautiful fourth tower, and his guru still was not happy with it. He thought all his work was for nothing, that Marpa was not going to give him the teachings. Hadn't he already proven his devotion to the guru? And yet, Marpa freely gave the teachings to all kinds of people who came to him, bringing gifts.



Dakmema knew how upset Milarepa was, and went to his room to console him. She said,

“The lama has always said that the teachings were brought back by him from India for the good of all sentient beings. Even if a dog were to come to him, he would give the dog the teachings, and dedicate the merits of the teaching for the benefit of all beings. Why he refuses to give them to you, I don’t know. In any case, do not have any bad thoughts because of it.”

Milarepa felt comforted by her compassionate words. She wished him a good night and left.

The next morning, Marpa came to Milarepa’s room, and said, “Great Magician, do not continue with the tower. Build a shrine room at the base of the tower surrounded by a covered walk with 12 columns. Then I will give you the secret teaching.”

Milarepa went out to the tower and started building a foundation and then started building the covered walkway. Every day as he was working, Dakmema brought him delicious food, and beer. She was full of kindness and goodness, which was a great comfort for Milarepa.

As he was almost finished with the shrine room and covered walkway, another well-known, powerful man came to Marpa, to receive a special initiation. Dakmema said to Milarepa, “Now, my son, you should be able to receive the initiation.”



She gave Milarepa a tub of butter, a piece of cloth, and a small copper cooking pot to give to Marpa.

Milarepa offered the gifts, as the others had offered them, to the area where Marpa was sitting. Then he took a seat, joining the others who were seated around the lama.

Marpa suddenly asked, “Great Magician, what gift have you brought that you place yourself with those who are here to receive the teachings?”

“This tub of butter, this piece of cloth, and this copper cooking pot.”

Marpa scowled and said, "These things have already been given to me by someone else. Do not give me my own goods! If you have something of your own to give, go and fetch it. If not, do not remain here."

Those words stung, but then Marpa got up and, muttering some unpleasant words, kicked Milarepa and threw him out. Milarepa wanted to sink into the earth.

In his deep misery, he thought, "Was this punishment for the murders I committed through sorcery and for the destruction of many fields of wheat and barley by hailstorms? Did the lama know that I would never be able to practice the Dharma? Or was it through lack of compassion that he would not teach me? Whatever it may be, of what use is this human body which, without the Dharma, only builds up impurities - negative thoughts, words and deeds? Should I kill myself?"

At that moment, Dakmema walked in, bringing him a piece of cake from the religious ceremony. She said kind words to him, consoling him, and then went away. But Milarepa had no desire to eat, and spent the whole night weeping and sobbing.

The next morning, Marpa came to his room and said, "Now, finish building the covered walkway and the tower. Afterward, I will give you the initiation and instruction."

Then Milarepa worked hard and finished the next level of the tower, and the covered walkway.



By that time, he had sores on his back from carrying stones and baskets of earth. Blood was running from the wounds. He showed his back, with several very large sores, to Dakmema. He begged her to rescue him by asking Marpa to teach him and remind Marpa of the promises he made at the time he was laying the foundation of the tower.

Dakmema looked with concern and compassion at the sores on his back, and tears poured from her eyes.

"I am going to speak to the lama," she said.

She went to Marpa, and spoke to him.

"Lama Rinpoche, the work Great Magician is doing has rubbed his skin raw. On his back are big sores streaming with blood. I have heard of, and even seen, horses and donkeys with sores on their backs, but I have never seen, nor heard of, such sores on the backs of men. I would be ashamed if other people were to see or hear of such a thing. I am even more ashamed,

knowing it was caused by a great lama such as yourself. Because he is truly worthy of compassion, give this child instruction. You said in the beginning that you would give him the teaching when he had built the tower.”

The lama replied, “That is just what I said. I said that I would give him my teaching when he had built a tower ten stories high. Where are the ten stories?”

Dakmema said, “He has built more than ten stories. He has constructed a lower covered walk.”

Marpa said, “Do not talk so much. If he builds ten stories I will instruct him. Does he really have sores?”

“Not only does he have sores, but there is almost nothing left of his back but sores. But you have so much power you can do whatever pleases you.”

After speaking to her husband, Dakmema, with great sorrow, then hurried to Milarepa. “Come with me,” she urged him.

As they walked toward Marpa, Milarepa thought, “Is he going to instruct me?”

The lama said to him, “Great Magician, show me your back.”

Milarepa took off his shirt and showed his back. Marpa examined it carefully, and then he said,

“My master Naropa went through 24 painful experiences – 12 great and 12 minor difficulties, all of which were worse than yours. As for me, without a thought for my own life or my wealth, I gave both to my master Naropa. So if you seek the teaching, be humble and continue the work on the tower.”

Milarepa thought, “He is right.”

From some of Milarepa’s clothing, Marpa created a pad to protect his wounds and said, “Since you work like horses and donkeys, use this pad for your wounds and continue to carry the earth and stones.”

Milarepa said, “How will the pad for the wounds cure the sores on my back?”

“The pad is to keep the dirt away from your sores.”

Thinking of Marpa’s words to work on the tower as an order, Milarepa went back to work, and carried the clay and sand for the mortar in a basket held in front of him to avoid rubbing the sores on his back.



As Milarepa worked, Marpa watched him, thinking, “This submission to everything that I command is extraordinary.” He secretly shed tears.

Nevertheless, after a few days, the sores became infected and Milarepa developed a fever and became ill. He told Dakmema about it.

Dakmema begged her husband to initiate him with the teachings, or at least, be permitted to rest and let his sores heal.

The lama replied, “As long as the tower is not finished, he shall have nothing. If he can work, let him do what he can; if he cannot, then let him rest.”

Dakmema went to Milarepa and said, “As long as your sores aren’t healed, just rest.” She gave him good healthy food for several days while he rested. For those days, Milarepa was happy except for his grief at not having received the teachings.

While his sores were still healing, Marpa came to Milarepa’s room. He didn’t speak about giving the teachings. Instead, he said,

“Great Magician, it’s time for you to go back to work on the tower.”

Milarepa was going to go back out to the tower and continue his work. But Dakmema said to him, “Between the two of us, let’s work out a scheme for you to get the teaching.”

Milarepa agreed, and then he tied his book and a few of his things on top of a small bag of flour, as if he were leaving. So that Marpa would see him, he asked Dakmema to help him.

She said in a loud voice, “If you ask the lama, he will give you the teaching. Stay here, even though you have been through so much.” She pretended to keep Milarepa from leaving.

Marpa said, “Woman, what are you two doing there?”

She answered, “Great Magician says that long ago he came from a far-off village to learn the teaching. Instead of the teaching, he has received only abusive words and blows. For fear of dying without the Dharma, he is going to look for another lama and is taking his belongings with him. Because of my pleas and promises that he would get the teachings, I have been able to delay his departure.”



Marpa simply said, "I understand." And then he came out and slapped Milarepa again and again.

He shouted, "When you came here, you at once gave me your body, speech and mind. And now where are you going? Surely you are not leaving? Since you belong to me, I could cut you, body, speech and mind, into a hundred pieces. If in spite of that you are going away, tell me, why are you taking my flour?"

And he kept slapping Milarepa. Then he took the bag of flour and put it back in the house.

Milarepa felt as anguished as a mother who has lost her only child. He followed the advice of Dakmema, and because Marpa was so terrible,

Milarepa went into the house, trembling, and began to weep.

Dakmema kindly said to him, "Whatever we may try, the lama will not give you the teaching now, but in the end he will surely give it to you. Meanwhile, I will instruct you."

She gave him a method of meditation. It didn't give Milarepa any great inner experience, but it calmed his mind and lifted his mood. He showed his gratitude to the lama's wife for her kindness. And he thought that because she was the wife of the great lama, she could purify his sins. So he served her everywhere she went. When she was milking the cows, he held the bucket for her, and when she roasted grain, he held the pans for her.

He also thought of looking for another lama. He thought, "If Marpa doesn't have the teaching for becoming enlightened in a single lifetime, certainly no other lama will have it. Even if I don't become enlightened at once, at least I have stopped doing acts that will lead to rebirth in the lower worlds. When I have suffered for the sake of Dharma the same difficulties as Naropa, the lama Marpa will proclaim with great joy that I have become worth of the teaching. Then I will meditate on it and hope in this way to attain Enlightenment in this lifetime."

As he thought in this way, he started digging up stones and earth to finish the covered walkway and shrine room. Soon thereafter, another powerful and well-known man, Lama Ngokpa, along with his students, came to visit Marpa, bringing many gifts, hoping to receive a special initiation.

Dakmema said to Milarepa, "If the lama is not satisfied with the tower that has been constructed and if he wants gifts, offer him a gift and make sure that he grants you the initiation."



She gave him a large deep blue turquoise stone that she had kept secretly, and said, "You ask him first, and offer him this. If he refuses, I shall ask for you."

Milarepa offered Marpa the blue turquoise stone, and said, "I beg of you, give me instruction on this occasion."

As he stood among the students, Marpa examined the stone, turning it over and over.

He said, "Where did Great Magician get this?"

Milarepa answered, "The mother Dakmema gave it to me."

The lama smiled and said, "Go and fetch her."

Milarepa begged Dakmema to come, and the lama said to her, "Where did we get this turquoise?"

Dakmema bowed deeply, and replied, "This turquoise is not your concern. When I was given to you in marriage by my parents, you flew into a furious rage. Then my parents secretly gave me this turquoise and said to me to put it away without showing it to anyone, and if ever I and my husband divorce, I may need it. I have given it to this child, for whom I feel unbearable pity. Accept it and grant initiation to the Great Magician. Lama Ngokpa, you and your students, who understand his grief at being left out from initiation, help me in my prayer."

She bowed many times to Marpa, who was so terrifying that Ngokpa and his students did not even dare utter a prayer. They just nodded to indicate approval and bowed along with Dakmema.

Marpa said, "Through the goodwill of my wife, this fine turquoise almost fell into the hands of a stranger." He tied it around his neck and said to his wife, "You do not think. If I am totally your master, I am also the master of your turquoise."

And to Milarepa, he said, "Great Magician, if you have some wealth, bring it, and be initiated. This turquoise is mine."

Thinking that maybe Dakmema would say something, Milarepa didn't move. But Marpa was furious and jumped up, saying,



“I sent you away, yet you are still here. What rudeness!”

He threw Milarepa to the ground on his face, and he couldn't see - everything went black.

Then Marpa grabbed him and threw him on his back, so that he saw stars. Marpa grabbed a stick, but Lama Ngokpa held him back.

Terrified, Milarepa jumped down into the courtyard. Marpa was concerned, but he pretended he was still angry.

Milarepa wasn't hurt but he was filled with grief and wanted to die. Dakmema came up to him in tears, saying, “Great Magician, don't be distressed. There is no student more faithful or loving than you. If you want to go to another lama for the teachings, I will prepare whatever is necessary for you. I will give you supplies and gifts.” Her words were comforting for Milarepa.

Up until that time, Dakmema would participate in her husband's gatherings. But that evening she stayed with Milarepa and wept with him the whole night.

The next morning, Marpa sent for Milarepa, who went to him, wondering whether he would get the teachings. Marpa asked,

“Aren't you dissatisfied by my refusal to teach you? Don't you have evil thoughts?”

Milarepa replied, “I have faith in the lama. And I have not uttered a single word of rebellion. On the contrary, I believe I am in darkness because of my own sins. I am the maker of my own misery.” Tears flowed from Milarepa's eyes.

Marpa said, “What do you expect to gain from me by these tears? Get out!”

Then in absolute misery, Milarepa thought to himself, “I owned things when I was committing bad deeds. Now that I am practicing the Dharma, I have nothing. If I had even half the gold I had when I was doing evil deeds, I could get initiation and the secret teaching. Now, without gifts, this lama will not teach me. Even if I go to another lama, he would expect gifts too. Dharma is forbidden to the poor people. Without Dharma, man is just a collection of bad deeds and I would do better to kill myself. What can I do? What can I do? Shall I go and serve a rich

man? Shall I earn money and get gifts to offer for the teaching? Since I cast spells, should I go back to my village? My mother would be happy to see me again, and I would be able to earn some money. Either I must search for some other place or seek money.”



He thought, “If I take the lama’s flour for food, it will only enrage him more.” So he took his books and left without saying anything, not even to the lama’s wife. As he walked away, he thought of her kindness.

Some hours later, after he begged for some tsampa (barley flour), borrowed a pot and struggled to prepare a meal for himself, he thought of how Dakmema cooked for him for such a long time. He thought, “I didn’t even say goodbye to her. Should I go back?”

But he didn’t have the courage to turn back. He returned the cooking pot, and then saw an old man who said, “Young man, you seem able to work. Rather than beg, go into homes and recite prayers, if you know how to read. If not, then work as a servant for food and clothes.”

Milarepa said, “I am not a beggar, and I know how to read.” Then man said, “Good, go and recite the prayers at my house, and I will pay you well.”

Milarepa was overjoyed. While he stayed there, he read many long prayers. Then he had a thought, “Maybe Marpa would give me the teaching. And if he doesn’t, then his wife has promised to help me meet another master.” He then had the courage to return, and he started walking back to Marpa’s house.

Meanwhile, after Milarepa had left, Dakmema said to her husband, “Your awful enemy has gone. Now are you happy?”



“Who has gone?” Marpa asked.

“Well, on who else have but Great Magician have you inflicted every misery and who else have you treated like an enemy?”

At these words, Marpa’s face became downcast, and his eyes were wet with tears. He cried out, “Lamas of the Kagyu Order, dakinis, and protectors of Dharma, bring back my predestined son!”

And with this prayer, he covered his head with his cloak and remained motionless.

At that moment, Milarepa arrived at Marpa’s door, where Dakmema greeted him. Joyously, she cried out, “Here you are just at the right moment. It appears that the lama will now teach you. I told him that you left, and he cried out, ‘Give me back my predestined son!’ Then he burst into tears. It seems you have softened

his heart.”

Milarepa thought, “She is just trying to soothe my heart. If it were really true that he had shed tears and said ‘predestined son’ then I would be completely happy. But if he said ‘Bring him back to me’ in the way he has refused me initiation and teachings before, then I am indeed unfortunate. I have nowhere else to go. Must I be miserable here, without ever getting the teaching?”

Dakmema said to the lama, “Great Magician has not left us. He has returned. May he come before you?”

Marpa replied, “He did forsake us, but he has not forsaken himself. If you wish, let him come.”

Milarepa entered the room, and Marpa said, “Great Magician, if from the bottom of your heart you wish for the Dharma with such impatience and restlessness, you must give your life for it. Complete the three remaining stories of the tower and I will give you the teaching. Otherwise, since it is expensive to feed you, and since you have somewhere to go to, go now.”

There was nothing Milarepa could say, so he left. On his way out, he said to Dakmema,

“He still refuses to instruct me. If I were sure he would give me the teaching when I finished the tower, I would stay. But, if when the tower is finished, he still decided not to teach me, there would be nothing I could do. I long to see my mother. Therefore, I ask permission to leave for my village. May both you and the lama remain in good health.”

He bowed to her, and, taking his books, prepared to leave.

Dakmema said, “My son, you are right. As I have already promised you, I will find a way to have you taught by Ngokpa, who is a great disciple of the lama and who is initiated. Stay a little longer and pretend to work.”

And with joy from her encouraging words, he stayed and worked on the tower.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Milarepa think at first that Marpa would give him the teachings without offering a gift? (Marpa said he would give the teachings if he builds the tower)
2. Why didn't Marpa accept the gift of butter, cloth and copper pot? (It was offered by others earlier)
3. What happened to Milarepa's back from working on the tower? (terrible sores)
4. So that Milarepa would keep working on the tower, Marpa reminded Milarepa of the difficulties experienced by himself (Marpa) and which other person? (Naropa)
5. What item of her own did Dakmema give for Milarepa to offer to Marpa? (turquoise)
6. After Marpa threw Milarepa to the ground, did Milarepa have any evil thoughts? (no)
7. What did Milarepa realize was the real cause of his suffering? (he had done bad deeds, he was the maker of his own misery)
8. Was Marpa glad when Milarepa left him? (no)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – SELF RESTRAINT:

“In your village where people have little love for you, you will practice virtue without distraction.”

-Marpa to Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa, p. 98)

“The words of my aunt are words of anger. Were I to speak the same language, we would destroy one another. Aunt, take my house and field. Take them and may you be happy. . . . It is through compassion that I overcome the demons.

Slander is thrown to the wind, and I turn toward higher aims.”

-Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa p. 115)

“It is said that patience is the best means of attaining Bodhi (Enlightenment). . . . It is thanks to my uncle and aunt that I have entered the path of liberation. As a token of gratitude I will pray unceasingly for their Enlightenment.”

- Milarepa (The Life of Milarepa, p. 114)

When something very terrible or unfair has happened to you, you might feel emotionally overwhelmed, so you want to cry, shout, hurt someone, or throw something.

You might be filled with negative thoughts.

An average person who was treated so cruelly like Milarepa might have done something really violent.

But Milarepa had more wisdom than that. He knew about the law of karma, and that the violence had already done with black magic was extremely bad karma.

So he knew that he would have to suffer a lot from the results of that karma.

The suffering from Marpa’s cruelty was a natural result of what he had done to others.

But he didn’t know how much suffering he deserved, so he sometimes felt Marpa was being too cruel, and unfair.

When bad things happen to us, we might think it’s unfair, we didn’t deserve that.

We feel like we are good people, so why should that happen to us?

We are good people, but the truth is, we all have bad karmas that we have done in past lives.

And we must suffer the results of them.

We don’t know when those painful results will come.

And we have no idea how much suffering we will have in this life from the karmas of our past.

So when terrible or unfair things happen to us, we must understand that it is the result of our own karmas. Then it won’t disturb us quite so much.

But we can let others know when they are being unfair or abusive!

We should try to do it without letting our anger and emotions get out of control.

That means we can use our voice to get their attention, but we should avoid shouting or using angry or insulting words.

That is having self-restraint, or self control, over our emotions.

That way, we can think more clearly and avoid getting the other person angry which may result in a big conflict with insults, hatred, and ongoing revenge.

But when we avoid fighting or arguing – does that mean we are being weak?

If a person has a strong body, an aggressive voice, and a lot of confidence, many people would say he looks like a strong person.

Just like a dog that is strong and confident, with a loud aggressive bark, seems like a strong dog. But people are more complex than dogs.

A person can look and sound big and strong, but that doesn't mean his mind is strong.

When something doesn't go his way and he gets upset, shouting and having a temper tantrum, then you can see that his mind is weak and he looks foolish.

But someone who has the strength of self-control remains calm and considers what proper action to take. He is stronger than someone who just has a strong body.

So when we control our emotions - our body, mouth and mind - then we are much stronger (and cooler!) than if we shout and fight.

How do we control our emotions when someone was unfair?

How do we resist the urge to punish him, insult him or use angry words?

We can quickly walk away if we need to prevent ourselves from saying or doing something in revenge.

We can do something we enjoy to get our mind off of the person.

Remember that if he did something wrong then that is his problem, his weakness, so we don't need to punish him, because his own karma will punish him.

If we try to punish him, then what happens to us? Then we will suffer the result of that revengeful deed.

Remember that we are good and that person can't bring us down.

Also, we can remember that if someone is unfair to us, and we are self-controlled, then he is actually helping us become stronger, to have self restraint, and to have better character!

ACTIVITY - Multiple Choice - circle the best answer:

1. If a person insults your best friend, it is best for you to:
 - a. say she or he will go to a hell-world
 - b. walk away from your friend
 - c. tell your friend to fight back
 - d. walk with your friend away from that person

2. If someone calls you bad names, it is best to:
 - a. think about some bad names you could call him
 - b. enjoy thoughts of how he will feel in a hell world
 - c. ignore him
 - d. stick your tongue out at him

3. If you feel very angry for what someone said about you, it is better to:
 - a. tell a friend how bad that person is
 - b. remember he made bad karma, not you
 - c. think about how to punish him
 - d. think about what he said

4. You can make yourself strong by:
 - a. remembering the law of karma
 - b. not fighting back
 - c. having self-control
 - d. a, b, and c

5. If you think about punishing someone for hurting you, change your thoughts by:
 - a. listening to music
 - b. thinking about how bad he is
 - c. doing some homework
 - d. a and c

6. Self restraint means:
 - a. helping others
 - b. not taking revenge
 - c. resisting the urge to shout at someone
 - d. b and c

7. If a person says or does something bad to you, remember:
 - a. his words and acts belong to him
 - b. you can gossip about him
 - c. you must suffer from his bad words and acts
 - d. if he doesn't believe in karma he won't suffer