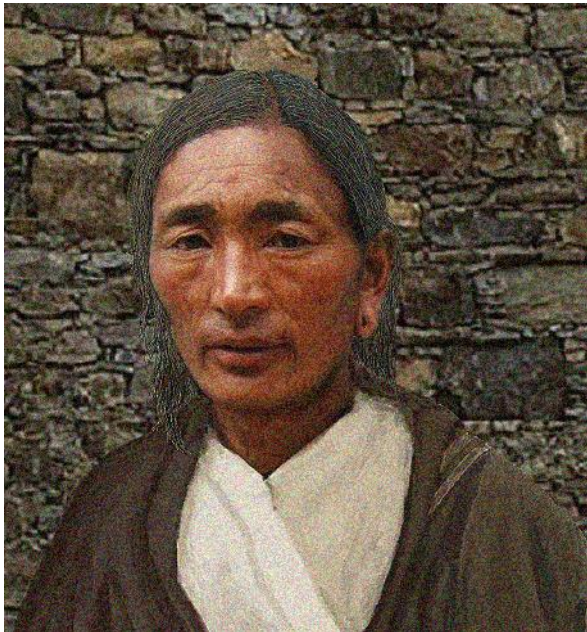


THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 34 – Practice Dharma When Young

A wealthy man named Shendormo, and his wife, Lekse Bum, had great faith in Milarepa from the time they first met him. Many years later, they invited him to their home. As soon as Milarepa arrived, Shendormo took Milarepa's hand in his hand and said,



“Now that I have become old, I am afraid of my death, which will come soon now. I regret not having had the opportunity to practice Dharma in your presence, Jetsun.”

Tears ran down his cheeks and he wept. He was so happy that Milarepa was there, but so sad that he had been busy all his life and had not practiced Dharma very much, and now he was close to dying.

Milarepa replied, “All sentient beings will experience the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death, except for the truly noble Dharma practitioners. If you have fear of death, then it would be good for you to practice Dharma at the time of death.” He sang:

“As for us, normal worldly beings,
there is not a single one who is without birth, old age, sickness and death.
Again and again, we spin around in the ocean of samsara (life, death, rebirth),
And not realizing it, we are distracted by the waves of suffering.
While not having a single moment of (true) happiness,
Because we fear that we will suffer, we create our suffering.
In hopes of getting happiness, we do negative things.
If you want freedom from this suffering, it's good to have no bad conduct or negativity.
It's good to practice the Dharma (even) at the time of death.”

Shendormo said, “Since I don't remember the suffering of birth, please teach us about it.”

Milarepa sang:

“To explain about the suffering of birth:
The consciousness wanders in the bardo (the world in between lives)
And . . . enters the mother's womb (belly).
When you enter into the mother's belly, it's like a fish getting caught in a net.
You are lying in liquid . . . and because of your bad karma,



You take a human body and experience suffering in negative places.
Though you remember your previous life, you can't say a word.
You experience many types of heat and cold for nine or ten months. . . .
When the time has come to be born from your mother,
It feels like your body is being crushed



You are taken onto your mother's lap, then snatched like a hawk snatches up a little bird,
And your body is cleaned, which is like being beaten.
When the cord (attaching you to your mother) is snipped, it's like your life-line being cut.
When you are placed in the cradle, it's like being bound and put into a dungeon.
If you don't realize the reality of not having to take any more births,
You can't imagine how terrible the suffering of birth is."

Then he said something very important for all of us to remember always:
The good Dharma that's needed before you die,
By putting it off until later, you're wasting your good fortune.
It is good to apply yourself now to practicing the Dharma."

Then Shendormo said, "Please also tell us something about the suffering of old age."

In reply, Milarepa sang:

"To explain about the suffering of old age:
The body's four elements – solid, liquid, warmth, and air – begin to fade away.
This suffering of old age brings such despair.
Though straight at birth, your body starts to bend.
Though you place your foot firmly, you totter and stagger.
Though your hair is black at birth, it starts to turn white.
The clear eyes become unclear.
The head, the main part, gets confused.
The ears that heard sounds begin to go deaf.
The color of the cheeks fades away.
The nose on your face also shrivels up,
Those strong, bright bones - the teeth - begin to fall out.
The power of speech - with the aging tongue, you can't talk as well. . . .



Suffering and worry return to you.
Though you speak the truth, no one will listen.
The children you lovingly raised get angry.
You give away all the wealth and things you own, without
getting any thanks in return.
Many curse you for taking too long to die.
If you don't realize the reality that is beyond old age,
Then the suffering of old age is unimaginable.
If you don't remember the good Dharma when you get old,
You will get the full results of your previous negative karma.
Right now for as long as you breathe, to practice the good
Dharma would be excellent!"

Then Shendormo said, "We have taken what you have said to heart. Now, please tell us about the suffering of sickness."



Milarepa sang,
"To explain about the suffering of sickness:
Sickness suddenly attacks the body, and pain comes
unexpectedly. . . .
When blood and pus start to boil and cause pain,
Sickness and discomfort cause the senses to collapse.
Though you lie in a comfortable bed, you toss and turn a
lot.
As a result of your previous karma of greed,
Though you're given good food, it just comes right back up.
Though you stay in a cool place, the fire element within you
makes you hot.

Though you wear warm clothes, the water element within you makes you cold.
Though friends and relatives surround you, there's no way they can take away your suffering of
sickness.

Though Bön doctors are experts in healing,
it's difficult to get rid of the illness that are the result of your previous bad karma.
If you don't realize the reality that is beyond sickness,
You can't imagine how terrible is the suffering of being very sick.
Since you don't know when sickness will come your way,
For fear of suffering, it's good to practice the Dharma now."

Shendormo said, "When I die, I want to know if I will be able to practice Dharma. Teach me
about suffering at that time."

Milarepa's song about death included these words:
"Some people who are dying cry out from their suffering,
Some think about their food and wealth, and how others will use everything they've saved up.

Though you have good friends, they'll be sickened to look at you. . . .
They'll take your body far away, then run away from it.
Whether burned with fire, thrown in the water, or thrown in a pit,
When you are no more, this is sure to happen.
Can you bear all this, you faithful ones?
On the morning when your breath comes to a stop,
No amount of worldly wealth will be of help to you. So, what are the greedy people thinking?
Though loved ones gather all around you, they'll have no way to help you for even a moment.
When you see that you'll be gone away from them, what can your loved ones do for you?
When that time comes, nothing will be of any help at all unless it is connected with the true
Dharma.
At the time of death, you should have nothing to regret.
Don't have any fear at the time of death!"

Shendormo paid close attention and meditated on the guidance Milarepa gave him. He learned how important it is to practice Dharma. At the time he died, his mind was focused on Dharma.



His wife, Lekse Bum, didn't want Milarepa to leave. She said, "Although Jetsun and your students won't stay here permanently, please, you must stay for at least a few nights."

She really seemed to need him to stay, so Milarepa and his students agreed to stay for seven days. During that period, there was a big gathering of all the people in the Nyanang area to make tsa tsas (small statues of a deity) for the merit of Shendormo, the man who died.

After the people finished making the tsa tsas and went back home, Lekse Bum and her baby were left alone with Milarepa and his students, who were quietly meditating.

She felt lonely and wanted to go out where there were other people. But she couldn't just leave her guests alone in her house while she went out. So she asked Milarepa,

"Would Jetsun and his students like to go for some entertainment?"

Milarepa answered, "I will not go."

"Very well," she said, "Since today is an important day for making merit, please help me make offerings in my shrine room and make tsa tsas. Since it is for helping sentient beings, I ask you to please take care of my child and the goats and sheep. Also, help me by cleaning the house and dishes."

Then she got dressed in her best clothes and jewelry and left the house.

Milarepa and his students were deep in meditation all the time she was gone, so they didn't help with anything Lekse Bum had asked them to do. The sheep walked out into the fields to eat the food crops rather than staying where they were supposed to stay.



When Lekse Bum returned home, her baby was crying. Seeing that they had done nothing at all, with great disappointment she said to Milarepa:

“It’s okay that you didn’t do the other things I asked you to do. But being a Dharma practitioner requires that you have great compassion. A little help for my baby, the goats and sheep is good virtuous activity. It couldn’t possibly be wrong for you to do it.”

Milarepa sang a song to explain, with words that were something like this:

“Where my mind lives, the vast field of great bliss,
Taking care of the animals of my mind,
I did not look after the animals made of flesh and blood.
Those made of flesh and blood are for Lekse Bum to take care of.

The mother of compassion and loving-kindness (in the mind)
Cares for the baby of awareness (in the mind),
So I wasn’t free to look after the one with snot and poo.
The infant with snot and poo is for Lekse Bum to take care of.

On the mountain of meditation,
I make tsa tsas of mindfulness without distraction,
So I wasn’t free to make any tsa tsas from clay.
The round clay ones are for Lekse Bum to make.

Upon the offering shrine . . . I offered lamps of meditation,
So I wasn’t free to place lamps with white cotton wicks.
Those with white cotton wicks are for Lekse Bum to place.

In the messy house of this body,
I scrubbed and cleaned the negativities of the mind.
So I didn’t scrub and clean your house.
To scrub and clean the house is for Lekse Bum to do.”

Lekse Bum was not amused. Other lamas seemed more respectful of the work that people do who have families. She replied, "Jetsun, please don't ignore the virtuous good work that we worldly people do. Besides you, I have also served other lamas."

Milarepa pointed out that other lamas might not have real compassion and understanding of what people really need to end their suffering. They might actually have greed, selfish desires, bad intent, and untrained minds.

Lekse Bum, recognizing the truth of Milarepa's words, regretted that she criticized Milarepa. She offered the best piece of turquoise from her jewelry as a gift to him, and then she asked him to take her with him. Milarepa gave her instructions for meditation, and told her to give up her attachments to comforts and luxuries, and her pride and ego. When she followed his instructions and practiced meditation, she became a great yogini.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why was Shendormo sad when he saw Milarepa? (he had been busy all his life and had not practiced Dharma very much, and now he was close to dying)
2. What four terribly painful experiences does each person suffer in their life? (birth, old age, sickness, and dying)
3. What did Lekse Bum ask Milarepa to do while she was away? (take care of the baby, sheep and goats, make tsa tsas and offerings on the shrine, clean the dishes and house)
4. What were Milarepa and his students doing while Lekse Bum was away from the house? (meditating)
5. Why didn't Milarepa take care of the baby and the sheep and goats while she was gone? (because it was Lekse Bum's responsibility)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Practice Dharma when young:

*"The good Dharma that's needed before you die,
By putting it off until later, you're wasting your good fortune.
It is good to apply yourself now to practicing the Dharma." p. 578*

*"If you think you have leisure (plenty of time) to put off practicing the Dharma until the future,
You will miss your chance.
Mix Dharma with your mind, and apply yourself in meditation.
If you're attached to (enjoyments in) this life, the next life will be difficult.
To delight in temporary pleasure will hold you back.
If you think you have leisure (lots of time) to put off practicing the Dharma, that is foolish. . . .*

*“Make your mind harmonious with the Dharma, and apply yourself in meditation. . . .
If you mix your mind with Dharma, everywhere you’ll have bliss”* p. 588-589.

*“Since you were young you’ve had no perseverance in Dharma.
To think you’ll practice when you’re old, what good will that do?”* p. 643

*“Youth should also practice the Dharma. If a youth is without Dharma, it’s like the blooming of
a poisonous flower. Children should also practice the Dharma. If a child is without Dharma, it’s
like a thief possessed by demons.”* p. 678.

*“If you cannot practice the genuine Dharma, then if you live long, your wrongdoing will be long!
Putting effort into mundane activity is just hard work!”* p. 651.

“The practitioner who wastes this life and has regret at the time of death is always miserable.”
p. 485.

*“This enemy that deceives you, called laziness,
Though you think it’s beneficial, it will only bring harm.
Do you know that laziness is an enemy? If you do, then you should leave it behind!”* p. 143.

*“With laziness, you won’t accomplish benefit for self or other;
have diligence, and strive in virtuous action.”* p. 650.

*“Obtaining the precious human birth with the freedoms and resources and being able to
practice the Dharma are very difficult.
Even if one does practice the Dharma, to amass all the perfect conducive conditions, such as
finding a guru, is also very difficult.
Now, while these conditions have come together, please practice the sublime Dharma.”* p. 113.

Let’s talk about that strange scenario, where Milarepa didn’t take care of Lekse Bum’s baby and farm animals. It wasn’t because he didn’t care about them. It was because it was more important for him to teach about responsibilities, including the responsibility of meditation. Of course, people with families have to spend time taking care of their families. But he wanted to show how important it is to meditate.

Most good-hearted people in the world are like Shendormo and Lekse Bum: they have so many responsibilities with work and family that they don’t have enough time to focus on the Dharma. When their work is done, they’re tired and they just want to relax, so they don’t take time to meditate, do prayers, read Dharma books, or go to the temple. And then when they are old, they’re either very worried about dying and about what will happen in their next life, like Shendormo, or they don’t want to think about it, because their life wasn’t as wholesome, as spiritual as they could have made it. They wish they had spent more time learning and practicing what the Buddha taught.

It's very difficult for older people to start meditating when their bodies are old and uncomfortable. And it's extremely hard for them to change their habits and ways of thinking. There is a saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

So, as Milarepa taught, it is extremely important for everyone to start learning and practicing Dharma when they are young – even from when they are children.

Why should we start when we are children?

One reason is that our habits are formed when we are young.

What we think about, what we talk about, and what we do create our character and our habits. And those habits remain with us through our life.

There is an easy way to remember this with the letters of the word "WATCH": we should watch our Words, Actions, Thoughts, Character and Habits.

Is there another reason to start young? Is Dharma helpful to you now, when you're young?

Yes! Especially in modern times, people have so much stress, and the world sometimes feels like a scary place. Buddha gave us exact instructions for calming the mind, to reduce stress.

You are very fortunate as a Buddhist to be able to learn these techniques and teachings.

But if you don't learn and practice them, then you won't get the benefits.

What are these benefits? How might meditation and Dharma practice help you when difficulties arise in your life, or when you feel stressed, angry, depressed, or anxious?

They help you to calm down, feel better, think clearly, and make good decisions.

How do we have time for Dharma when our lives are so busy and full of distractions? We have full schedules, activities, school and homework, and there isn't time for anything extra.

But we don't need any extra hours or minutes in the day to practice Dharma!

It's very easy to chant "Om Mani Padme Hum" anytime, anywhere. We can even chant silently.

You can set a certain time in your daily routine when it's easy for you to chant it, for example, while you take a shower, or while you brush your teeth.

And it's so easy to practice mindfulness wherever you are, especially when you are alone – for example, when you're walking, waiting for something, eating, or relaxing.

You can sit and meditate for just a few seconds, for example, when you're ready to go to bed. It helps you relax and get ready to sleep.

And, you can practice kindness wherever you are – be aware of when someone may want help, be friendly to someone who seems lonely or upset.

When you start these good habits when you're young, then they help you for your whole life!

You can start a habit of morning practice by saying a prayer, or chanting "Om Mani Padme Hung" before you start your day. Just a few seconds in the morning can start a lifelong practice that starts your day in the best way!

What if you don't feel like doing a morning practice?

Here is a very simple technique you can use whenever you don't feel like doing something you are supposed to do, when you don't feel motivated, or if you are in a bad mood.

Take three steps: (1) Just move your body to the place you are supposed to be, (2) take a deep breath, and (3) start. Then your mood likely will change as you see that it's not that bad, and before long you have done it. And then you have a feeling of accomplishment.

ACTIVITY – Questionnaire:

Carefully choose and circle the answer that best describes you. Take your time, and most importantly, be totally honest, so this questionnaire can help you!

1. I help at home in the kitchen (set table; clean dishes, table or floor; or take out the trash):
 - a. Never or very rarely
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Every day or almost every day
2. I help mother or father with other work in the house or in the yard:
 - a. Never or very rarely
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. A couple times a week or more
3. I clean up my bedroom:
 - a. Often on my own
 - b. When a parent tells me to
 - c. When someone helps me
4. If someone has something I want:
 - a. I always ask first if I can have it
 - b. I usually ask if I can have it
 - c. I often just take it
5. When I see a classmate who is very upset, I usually:
 - a. Laugh or ignore them
 - b. Ask "what's wrong?"
 - c. Try to find a way to help them feel better
6. When someone makes me very angry I usually:
 - a. Think about how I will get them back for what they did
 - b. Think about how bad they are
 - c. Think of karma or compassion
7. I chant "Om Mani Padme Hum":
 - a. Every day or almost every day
 - b. Sometimes during the week
 - c. Only when I am at a temple
8. I sit and meditate:
 - a. Only when I am in this class
 - b. Sometimes during the week
 - c. Every day or almost every day
9. I can sit totally still and meditate for:
 - a. Several minutes
 - b. A couple minutes
 - c. Only a few seconds
10. I remember to be mindful:
 - a. Several times during the week
 - b. Occasionally
 - c. Only when teacher instructs me to be mindful

Give yourself 2 points for each answer of "c" that you circled for questions 1, 2, 5, 6 or 8.

Give yourself 2 points for each answer of "a" that you circled for questions 3, 4, 7, 9 or 10.

Give yourself 1 point for each answer of "b" that you circled.

Give yourself 0 points for all other answers ("a" for 1, 2, 5, 6, or 8 and "c" for 3, 4, 7, 9, or 10).