

## THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 33 – Equanimity

After pleading with Milarepa, Rechungpa finally went to Central Tibet. He stayed in a monastery there, and became the chief teacher even though he was not a monk.



While he was at the monastery, he met a beautiful princess and fell in love with her. He thought about marrying her.

Many, many miles away, Milarepa knew about Rechungpa's love for the princess, and was not pleased, because Rechungpa would be focused on a wife and family and then neglect his spiritual practice.

Having a wife and family is good for most men, but not for Rechungpa, who was a very special and advanced yogi.



So, Milarepa appeared in the form of a beggar in the area near Rechungpa's monastery.

When Rechungpa saw the beggar, he felt sincere compassion and gave him a large piece of very valuable turquoise, not knowing that the beggar was actually his guru in disguise.

Milarepa, in the form of the beggar, was pleased, thinking, "My son does not have attachment to material things and has great compassion."

Because of the compassion Rechungpa had and the merit he made in giving the turquoise to the beggar, Rechungpa's mind became more pure, which made his attraction to the princess fade away. He realized that she could not make him truly happy. He would only be happy if he put all his time and effort into meditating and seeking enlightenment. He felt ashamed that he had been so distracted by her. So, he left her and decided to return to his dear guru Milarepa.

He started off on the long journey toward the area where Milarepa was staying. As he was traveling along the road, he saw a lady with some dried meat. Rechungpa asked for some of the meat, and she gave it to him. He cut it up nicely to offer it to Milarepa.

Meanwhile, Milarepa, sitting among his students, saw with his yogic vision that Rechungpa was coming from many miles away. He said, "Rechungpa is coming, carrying something that's so big it won't fit in this valley." The students wondered what he meant by that.

When Rechungpa arrived, he gave a full bag of meat as a gift to Milarepa, and asked him about his health. Milarepa sang a song that included these words:

“Without arrogance or desire to be popular,  
Then I say nothing wrong, so I am happy.  
Wherever I stay is fine; where I am, I’m happy.  
Whatever clothes are fine, and whatever I do, I’m happy.  
Whatever food is fine; with whatever I get, I’m happy.  
A man like me is always happy.  
Son, Rechungpa, did you come here happy?”

The meat offered by Rechungpa was cooked with some vegetables and served to all of the monks.

A monk said loudly, “Jetsun Milarepa said that his heart-son Rechungpa was coming with a gift that was so big it wouldn’t fit in the valley. What was that gift?”

Milarepa smiled and replied, “The offering of meat and vegetables won’t fit in the valley of your belly!” and everyone laughed, knowing that the monk really, really loved to eat. Milarepa said, “Now I will give you all an empowerment.”



As the shrine was being prepared for the empowerment ceremony, Rechungpa noticed that near the center of the offerings on the shrine, there was the piece of turquoise that he had given the beggar! It was surely the same one. But how did it get there? Rechungpa was shocked as he realized that the beggar to whom he gave the turquoise was actually Milarepa in disguise, many, many miles away from his cave. How powerful Milarepa was!

And Rechungpa realized that because of Milarepa’s great compassion for him, he was able to leave the princess and focus again on his spiritual practice.

Milarepa revealed that he also had saved him from another problem. He said, “Rechungpa, if it were not for me, the value of this turquoise would have ruined you. Bu you had constant devotion toward me and you never abandoned your compassion for other beings. I am satisfied.”

He didn't explain how the turquoise would have ruined Rechungpa, but having something very valuable can cause trouble when one is too attached to it or too concerned with wealth.

He sang a song to teach him about his good deed, and about some of his mistakes:

“When you gave turquoise to the beggar, it was I who received it,  
And this evening it's a ritual gift to the Chakrasamvara empowerment.  
The compassion you have for those with no power  
Is like an offering to the buddhas of the three times (past, present and future).  
Your offering with compassion to me, that beggar, was actually an offering to Milarepa.  
Since all beings have been our fathers and mothers in past lives,  
To reject or discriminate against any of them,  
Is like eating poison without being aware. . . .  
Showing off your own opinions with attachment and aggression  
Is like throwing all your training away. . . .  
All of one's happiness comes from others,  
And all that you do for others is the cause of your happiness.  
All types of harm that you do to others causes negativity for yourself. . . .  
Confess all of your negative downfalls,

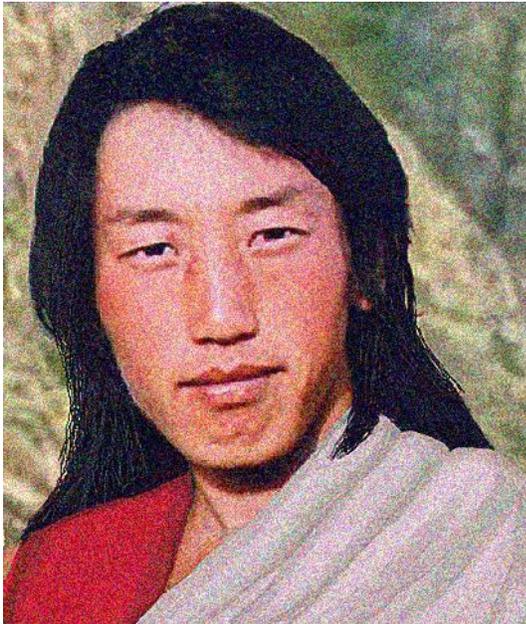


And make strong commitments to keep your vows (of having bodhicitta).”

Rechungpa started thinking about all the wrong things he had done, and admitted them in front of Milarepa and his Dharma friends, with these words:

“With the karma of distraction, wishing to be comfortable,  
I followed after things that appeared to be pleasant.  
I was fooled by it, and gathered negative karma of the lower worlds.  
I confess these to my father guru. . . .  
Careless speech and dishonesty, these I confess to my father guru.  
Wishing for pleasure is the cause for a negative mind.

With desire to be famous (popular) and doing what is not Dharmic,  
One builds up all kinds of negative karma.  
I confess these to my father guru.”



Then Milarepa gave the empowerment and instructions to all the students.

Afterward, Repa Shiwa Ö, who was sitting in the row of students, said to Milarepa,

“Rechungpa is someone who has mastered the body’s energy and the mind, and he had a secret girlfriend. Why is it necessary for Rechungpa to confess mistakes here?”

He didn’t think Rechungpa should have to admit mistakes in front of everyone when he is such a great yogi.

Milarepa disagreed, and explained that Dharma friends must support one another, that the student must listen to his teacher, and that there are so many types of mistakes that students might make. They can learn from hearing each other’s mistakes.

Rechungpa made a commitment to do whatever his guru advised. In the next few nights, he had very interesting dreams, and he asked Milarepa what they meant. Milarepa told him that the dreams mean that he will be enlightened, that he will also sing songs expressing his experience, that he will have many students, and that he will spread the teachings of the whispered lineage of the Kagyu lamas. Milarepa then said something surprising:

“Since all these things will happen, you don’t need to remain here at my side. You can now go out and teach! The time has come for those who you will teach, so go and do this great benefit for yourself and others.” Before, Milarepa didn’t give permission for Rechungpa to leave, but now he was telling him to go!

He also sang these general instructions:

“Listen now, my son, Rechungpa!

If you wish to practice Dharma from the depths of your heart,  
You must use Dharma’s medicine against the negative emotions.

Don’t just speak nice words that you don’t practice.

It is important to give up always trying to be comfortable.

Listen now, my son Rechungpa!

If you wish to reach buddhahood,

Don’t concern yourself with the pleasures of this life.

Don’t lose your true goal that depends on the mind.

Make meditation stable within your mind!”

Milarepa then said, "Rechungpa, in the past when I told you to stay, you wanted to go. But now you should go to the holy site of the Shampo Snow Mountain. Help sentient beings there at the southern border of Tibet."

Before, Rechungpa had strong desires to travel and teach, so he could live a more comfortable life and be around more people. And now, he didn't want to leave. But he agreed to go as his guru directed him to do. He requested that Milarepa stay in good health and continue to guide him. Milarepa told him that it is very important that he return in a few years on a certain day. Then Milarepa gave him a piece of gold.

Although he knew he would return to his guru, Rechungpa felt it was almost unbearable to leave. But he was determined to go, as Milarepa told him that it was time to go. He sang a song to his guru, held Milarepa's feet to the top of his head in great devotion, and then left on his journey.



When Rechungpa arrived at Shampo Snow Mountain, he stayed at the monastery there. One day, a lady came to visit him. At first, Rechungpa wouldn't allow her to see him, but after a while, from his great compassion, he let her speak to him. She was very poor and suffering in many ways.

He was shocked when he realized that she was the same princess he had fallen in love with! Her life had completely changed after he had left her. Rechungpa had extreme compassion for her, and he gave her the gold that Milarepa had given him. He told her to

make statues of Buddha with the gold in order to purify the problems of her body.

The man who she was staying with had a terrible skin disease, and she later brought him to see Milarepa, who gave them both instructions for practicing Dharma and meditating.

The man's skin disease disappeared as a result of his practice, and the princess became an excellent yogini who helped many other people.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Why didn't Milarepa want Rechungpa to marry the princess? (Rechungpa would focus on her and neglect his Dharma practice)
2. Why did Rechungpa decide to leave the princess? (his mind was more pure from giving the beggar the turquoise, so he realized the princess wouldn't make him truly happy)

3. What kind of food was Milarepa happy with? (whatever food he gets)
4. What kind of clothes was Milarepa happy with? (whatever clothes he gets)
5. Should all people, even great yogi students of Milarepa, admit their mistakes? (yes)
6. Did Rechungpa want to travel away from Milarepa? (he did earlier, but later he didn't)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Equanimity:

*“Without arrogance or desire to be popular,  
Then I say nothing wrong, so I am happy.  
Wherever I stay is fine; where I am, I’m happy.  
Whatever clothes are fine, and whatever I do. I’m happy.  
Whatever food is fine; with whatever I get, I’m happy.  
A man like me is always happy.”* p. 662.

*“Not needing this or that, I feel good. . .  
Without the suffering of keeping things, I feel good.  
With no worry of them getting lost, I feel good.  
With no fear of them running out, I feel good. . . .  
With no weariness or irritation, I feel good. . . .  
Whatever I do is Dharma, and that feels good.  
No weariness of wishing to roam around feels good. . . .  
Resting in equality, I feel good. . . .With no hope or fear, I feel good. . . .  
In life I feel good, because virtuous activity increases.”* p. 108.

*“The practitioner who follows whatever feelings arise,  
letting attachment and aversion come as they please, is always miserable.”* p. 485.

*“I realize attachment and anger are suffering’s cause.  
I’ve cut all such ropes and tormented mind states.”* p. 545.

*“Not staying alone and preferring distractions,  
Unable to bear hardship and delighting in pleasantries,  
Just wanting to chat when it’s time for meditation . . .you will not reach enlightenment.”* p. 625.

*“If you wish to practice Dharma from the depths of your heart,  
You must use Dharma’s medicine against the negative emotions. . . .  
It is important to let go of the goal of trying to be comfortable.”* p. 668.

Rechungpa didn't want to stay with Milarepa in a lonely cave way up in the mountains. He probably thought it's uncomfortable, cold, boring, with nothing to do and nowhere to go. But later, after he returned to Milarepa, he felt it was unbearable to leave. He had an extremely strong desire to leave, and later, an extremely strong desire not to leave.

We all have many desires; we want what is comfortable and we avoid what is uncomfortable. And of course, we want what is good for us and we avoid what is harmful. We want to enjoy friends and fun activities, be successful in what we do, and so on. But some people have too many strong desires that get in the way of their happiness. Have you ever noticed anyone who very often gets angry and complains because they don't get what they want? Or someone who very often shouts because they don't like something? They expect to get what they want, insist on doing this and not that; going to this place and not that place; eating this and not that; or playing with this one and not that one. We may sometimes feel this way too when we are needing attention, feeling irritable, or something is bothering us. But generally, if a person is too focused on what they like and what they dislike, they are making themselves miserable. When they want so many things, then every time they can't get it, they're upset; when they hate so many things, then every time they must face it, they're upset.

Milarepa, on the other hand, sang about being happy with whatever food and clothes he gets, and being happy wherever he stays. He was teaching Rechungpa about equanimity. What is equanimity? It means cool-headed, not getting too excited or upset about anything. It doesn't mean not caring at all - like someone who is depressed - or hiding your feelings. Equanimity means being flexible, open-minded, and peaceful. It's the opposite of being too choosy, too picky, petty, and too demanding. It means having a good attitude even when you don't get what you want or when things don't go the way you like. Someone who has equanimity is generally content, and not always wishing for something else.

But we can't be just like Milarepa, simply content with everything the way it is. Everyone expects to be happier when they get more money, more success, or more stuff that you like, right? We think we'll be happier when we get those things that we want. But that kind of happiness is temporary; once it disappears, we want something else. And, desires come and go; we really want something one day, and later we don't want it, like Rechungpa wanted to leave Milarepa and then didn't want to leave.

We're always trying to satisfy ourselves with things outside us, in the outside world. But happiness from these things never lasts for very long. We get true, lasting happiness - real satisfaction - from inside ourselves, when we feel good about ourselves. Similarly, unhappiness is not so much from what we don't have, but from not knowing how great we are.

Who are you, really? Your body? Your name? Your talents? Thoughts? Your likes and dislikes? Those are all temporary things. Even your body will disappear one day. What doesn't ever disappear is your Buddha Nature, the part of you that has all the best qualities – such as love, compassion, wisdom - like a buddha.

How can we feel better about ourselves - feel closer to our Buddha Nature - so that we don't get so upset when we don't get what we want? How do we develop more equanimity?

Notice when you are complaining, or when you say or think "I hate this!" Then, remember that everything is temporary, impermanent; it will be gone soon. Maybe you can try to think of something positive about it. Maybe you can learn something from it. Ultimately, it might turn out to be good for you.

Also, try to avoid comparing what you have with what others have. When you always want what others have, you make yourself miserable. Comparing - thinking that you should have what others have - steals away your joy. Enjoy what you have, let others enjoy what they have.

Another way to develop equanimity is to notice your expectations. Do you have high expectations that everything will happen as you want it to happen? Or do you consider that things may go differently, they may not work out? If you're open-minded - if you just do your best, be confident in yourself, but don't expect a certain outcome - then you won't be so disappointed when things work out differently.

The more we practice kindness and compassion, the more we see our own Buddha Nature. Remember that happiness is inside you, not outside you.

ACTIVITY – Make a list:

Write the headings "Things I like" and "Things I dislike" at the top of a page, and then make list under each heading of things you love or like the most, and of things you hate or dislike the most.

This exercise gives an awareness of what might excite or upset us the most, where we might try to practice more equanimity.