

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 17 – Courage

One morning, after meditating very deeply alone in the mountains for a long period of time, Milarepa got up. He was living in a small meditation hut, which was constructed inside a cave. He wanted to cook breakfast to eat for the first time in many days. But he saw that there was no more tsampa (roasted barley flour), no more salt or other seasoning, and no water in his water container, so he had nothing to eat. He didn't even have any wood with which to start a cooking fire. He thought,

“It seems that my ignoring my body's needs and forgetting about supplies has become too extreme. I'll go out and gather some wood.”

He went out of the cave and gathered some dry sticks. He folded them in the lower part of his robe to carry back to the hut. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind blew, so he held onto his robe, so it wouldn't blow off of him. But as he moved his arm to hold onto his robe, the wind blew some sticks out of his robe. He reached out to hold onto the sticks, but then the wind blew his robe off of his body and kept blowing it away so fast that he couldn't catch it. He felt the disappointment of losing his robe, which came from the attachment he had to his robe. He thought,

“Even though I have been meditating for so many years, I haven't given up my self-clinging, thinking about myself. What's the use in dharma and practice without giving up clinging to the self?”

He said out loud, “If you want my clothes, take them! If you want my wood, take it!”

He gave up on having his clothes and firewood, and sat down. But because he had not eaten in many, many days, his body was so weak that he fainted. When he opened his eyes again, he saw his robe hanging at the top of a tree, waving in the breeze. He felt disappointed and helpless, with his body so weak and without any way to get food.

He saw a cloud in the sky to the east, and he remembered his lama, Marpa, lived in that direction. He remembered when he was with Marpa and his wife Dakmema, and all the students who were his dharma brothers and sisters, and he received the precious teachings. He thought,

“How nice it would be, if he's there now, to go and meet him.”

The memories of his lama made him feel felt extremely sad with longing to be with him, so Milarepa sang a song calling out to him.

Then, Milarepa looked up in the sky.



And there he saw his lama!
Marpa appeared on a cloud,
riding on a white lion, looking
more splendid than when
Milarepa had been with
Marpa in the past.

Marpa said, “My son, Great
Sorcerer, why have you called
out to me with such anguish?
Have you lost trust in the
supreme jewels of the guru
and the yidam deity? Have
you been chasing your
thoughts? Have thoughts of
the Eight Worldly Reactions –
of gain and loss, pleasant and
unpleasant, admiration and
criticism, popularity and
unpopularity - corrupted your
meditation? Are thoughts of
hope and fear getting to you?”

He continued, “Haven’t you given so much service to the guru, shown generosity to other beings, purified your mind and developed excellent qualities? Haven’t the right conditions for these things arisen? Whatever it may be, you and I are always together. So, through your practice, help the teachings and other beings.”

Then he disappeared. Having seen this vision, Milarepa felt unbearable joy. His lama had said that they are always together – in the mind. He sang a song that included these words:

Seeing my father guru and hearing him talk, . . .
Remembering my guru’s life as an example,
From deep down, devotion and realization arose.
I truly received his compassion and blessings,
All non-dharmic thoughts stopped.
My longing song of remembering my guru
Pained his ears and yet I, a beggar, couldn’t help it; I would do it again.
Please continue to hold me with your compassion.
This practice of persistence and endurance in hardship,
This is the service to please my father guru . . .
Practicing dharma for my whole life,
This is how I’m generous to other beings. . .
Father Guru, I repay your kindness through practice.

Protect your son with compassion, Lord Guru.
Grant your blessing that I may stay in meditation retreats in the mountains.

With a clear and happy mind, he suddenly had more energy, and he went and got his robe from the top of the tree, and brought a handful of firewood back to his meditation hut.

When he walked into his hut, what he saw gave him a big shock. He had developed his mind so that he could see supernatural beings that are invisible to most people. And what he saw in his hut were five demons! One was on Milarepa's bed teaching dharma, two of them were listening to him, one was preparing food, and one was reading Milarepa's books. While Milarepa stood there, they all turned and looked at him with huge gaping eyes.



Milarepa thought, "These must be local spirits that are not pleased with me. Wherever I've stayed, I always made an offering of a tormo (a small offering cake), and praised how wonderful the place was. I should praise this place, too."

So, he sang a song about how great yogis have stayed there, and about the clouds and river, plants and trees, bees and birds, monkeys, deer and antelope that live there. At the end of his song, he sang that he is in harmony with the deities there, and that the harmful spirits should enjoy his love and compassion. And then, to chase them away, he sang "be off to your own lands!"

The demons made hostile faces at Milarepa, and then looked at each other with angry glances. Then two more demons suddenly appeared, so now there were seven. Some of them stood in front of him, biting their lips with an angry expression. Some of them bared their fangs angrily. Some of them laughed and yelled with booming voices. All of them swiped and stabbed in the air with their sharp claws, looking like they would attack Milarepa, trying to scare him.

He thought, "They are making obstacles for me." With an aggressive look on his face, he recited powerful mantras. But they didn't go anywhere.

So, he thought of having great compassion for them, and began to teach them Dharma. But they didn't pay attention.

Milarepa thought, "Marpa pointed out to me that everything we see is just from one's own mind. These demons are just in my mind. So, to think of them as real and to want to make them leave is useless."

He realized that he had fear of them and a desire for them to leave. The fear and desire were impurities in his mind. He had to get rid of those impurities! He thought about the precious teachings from Marpa, and realized there was no reason to be afraid at all. What could the demons do to him? Nothing, because he was a great practitioner of Dharma! Demons can't hurt someone who has purified his mind! He then felt fearless and confident, and sang a song about courage, which included these words:

Father, victorious over the armies of the four Maras (demons),
I bow at the feet of Marpa.
People call me a human,
But I am the son of the great snow lioness . . .
As a full-grown lion I wander in snowy mountains.
I have no fear of stormy blizzards; I'm not afraid of steep rocky cliffs.





People call me a human,
But I am the son of the eagle, the king
of birds. . .
As a full-grown eagle, I fly in the sky.
I have no fear of the sky's expanse,
I'm not afraid of hidden, dark places.



People call me a human,
But I am the son of the huge
whale. . .
A full-grown great whale, I roam
the vast sea.
I have no fear of the sea's
mighty waves, I'm not afraid of
hooks or nets.

People call me a human,
But I am the son of the Kagyu gurus. . .
I wander in mountain retreats.
Though ghosts may be savage, I am not afraid.
Thought demons play many tricks, I am not afraid.

When the lioness stands in the snow, her paws do not freeze . . .
The flying eagle cannot fall from the sky . . .
When the whale swims in water, it cannot drown . . .
I, Milarepa have no fear of ghosts.
You bunch of ghosts, demons and spirits here,
How nice it is that you've come at this time.
Don't hurry; relax and stay for awhile. Let's chat about everything.
You're hurried? Aw, you can stay just one night!
We'll have a contest and see the difference between virtue and non-virtue.
I won't let you leave until you've made some obstacles.
If you should go back without making obstacles,
How ashamed and embarrassed you'll be to have come here.

After he sang his song, Milarepa got up with confidence and charged in among the demons. They glanced at each other, blinking, back and forth, in fear. Their bodies quivered, which made everything inside the hut shake slightly.

Then suddenly, six of the demons floated toward the other demon, and they disappeared into that one, so there was only one demon left. Then a big strong gust of wind blew through the hut, and that demon vanished also.

Milarepa thought, "The king of spirits, trying to make problems, really tried hard! The gust of wind that blew away my firewood and my robe was also his magic. But because of my guru's compassion, he was not able to get me."

With the courage he developed through this experience with the demons, he could meditate even better than before.

QUESTIONS:

1. What happened that made Milarepa unhappy, longing to see his lama? (the wind blew away his robe and firewood.)
2. What did he see when he looked at the sky? (his lama, Marpa)
3. How are Marpa and Milarepa always together, when they live far apart? (they are together in the mind)
4. What did he see when he went into his hut? (five demons)
5. At first, how did he try to make the demons leave? (sang a song about how wonderful the place was, and then told them to enjoy his love and compassion and then be off to their own land)
6. What other ways did Milarepa try to make them leave? (chanted a powerful mantra, tried to teach them Dharma)
7. How did he finally get them to leave? (he remembered he was a great practitioner of Dharma, so he was fearless and confident, and sang a song about courage)
8. What animals did he sing about in his song of courage? (snow lion, eagle, whale)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Courage:

Milarepa found that saying things to the demons that might please them, and then telling them to go away, didn't make them go away.

Even chanting a powerful mantra didn't make them go away.

And even trying to teach them Dharma didn't work.

Why didn't those methods work?

Because he still had fear when he said nice things, when he chanted the mantras and when he tried to teach them Dharma.

He wasn't very confident, and even if he tried to act like he wasn't afraid, he didn't sound very confident when he spoke.

The demons knew he was afraid, and so they knew he couldn't make them go away.

He also knew he was afraid, and that made him want them to leave.

The fear and desire for them to leave were impurities in his mind.

He had to get rid of those impurities.

He thought about what he had learned from his guru, Marpa, and realized there was no reason to be afraid at all. What could the demons do to him?

Nothing! Because he was a great practitioner of Dharma. He had been meditating with great dedication.

Practicing meditation makes a person's mind very powerful, so he sang that his mind is strong like a snow lion, an eagle, and a whale, and a yogi who has great powerful gurus.

He remembered that if he practices the Dharma – if he protects the Dharma - then the Dharma protects him.

And then he had genuine courage, and his fear disappeared.

His mind was purified of all his fear and desire for them to leave.

When the demons saw that he had a pure and fearless mind, they knew they couldn't scare him, and so they had to leave.

Also, he wanted the demons to be in a contest with him to talk about virtue and non-virtue.

Then they would know that he is confident in his virtues.

And they would have to leave, because they can't overpower a person with strong virtues, a great practitioner of Dharma.

Having strong virtues, that is, following Dharma, gives us strength, confidence, and courage.

If we protect the Dharma - if practice it – then the Dharma protects us.

What do we mean by practicing Dharma? Developing virtues like love, compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, mindfulness, helping others, and being unselfish.

The more we practice these virtues, the more our fears go away.

Can you think of some situations which require courage?

There are plenty of dangerous or risky things that some people like to do to show off their courage, that don't involve helping others.

This is for the ego; this is not a Dharmic kind of courage.

Courage that arises from compassion is Dharmic courage.

Courage to help someone when it's difficult to help them, is Dharmic courage.

Courage to do the right thing when it is easier to do the wrong thing, is Dharmic courage.

Courage to be a leader and do the right thing when your friends don't want to, is Dharmic courage.

Courage to face difficulties is another type of Dharmic courage.

Nothing can happen to us except what we deserve according to our own actions, our own karmas.

Anything that makes us suffer is the result of our karmas.

When we suffer from difficulties, we are burning away the results of our negative karmas.

So in a way, the difficulties are actually good, because our negative karma is disappearing!

And now we are doing good karmas, so we won't build up more bad karmas.

When we have courage, we can remain calm. And when our mind is calm, we can think clearly of the best way to handle a situation, or of the best solution to a problem.

There is another type of courage that is very important in the Dharma – speaking up for the truth, defending those who are innocent, even if others might disagree with us.

Sometimes it's easier to just look the other way and not risk getting in trouble yourself, or wait for someone else to speak up.

But when we have compassion for others and the courage to help them, we create good karma.

ACTIVITY – Color a snow lion (next page)

