

## THE LIFE OF NAROPA, Part 2 – Desire

Naropa, on his way to find his Lama, Tilopa, had seen terrible visions of a woman with leprosy, a wounded dog, and a man pounding the head of another man. As he continued his journey, walking alone, he saw more visions. The next vision was much worse. He saw a man cutting out the insides of another man. It looked disgusting, so Naropa didn't want to look too closely, but he wanted to find his Lama. So he asked the man doing the cutting, "Have you seen Tilopa?" The man answered, "Help me to chop this and I'll tell you." Naropa, horrified by his request, refused to help him. The man said, "If you don't cut off the continuous guts of samsara (worldly life), then you cannot find the Lama." Then the man disappeared.

The next vision also was awful. Naropa saw a man cleaning out the inside of another man's body. Naropa asked him, "Have you seen Tilopa?" The man answered, "Help me with this cleaning and I'll tell you." Naropa thought, "That is gross, I'm not going to do that!" So he refused to help. The man said, "If with the great teachings you don't wash out your impure thoughts, you cannot find the Lama." Then the man disappeared.

Naropa continued his journey. Finally, he saw some people on the side of the road. They looked like normal people with nothing strange going on, so he hoped they could help him. He asked, "Have you seen Tilopa?" They answered, "Go and ask the King." He went to see the local King, and respectfully asked him, "Dear King, have you seen Tilopa?" The King just said, "Marry my daughter and live here in my kingdom." Naropa didn't think that this was a vision. He would do anything to find his Lama, and he was being offered the lovely daughter of the King. He thought, "I should do what he asks so he will tell me where Tilopa is." So he accepted her and they got married.



Not long afterward, she decided not to be with him anymore, and left him. Naropa became angry and began to hate her for leaving him. He was so angry at her that he cast a spell on her.

Just then he heard a celestial voice that said, "Anger and hatred arise from desire. That is what is found in the lower realms, the hell-worlds. Then how can you find the Lama? Are you deceived by an illusion?"

Then the whole kingdom disappeared, and Naropa realized that the kingdom, King and his daughter were all illusions. And he had learned a lesson from it.



Naropa continued on his search for Tilopa, and next he met a hunter killing wild animals. Naropa felt compassion for the animals and wished that the hunter would stop killing them.

The hunter said to him, “I, the hunter, wish to kill the wild beast of grasping and desire. Tomorrow I go to a city.” Naropa realized it was another vision with a teaching that he must get rid of his grasping and desire. And perhaps it was a message that he should go to a city.

So he went to a nearby city. He asked people there, “Have you seen Tilopa?” They gave him a clue to go to a river, where he found a woman fishing. He asked her whether she had seen Tilopa, “First, it’s time to eat, so let’s prepare food.” The woman cooked a fish right there by the river and offered it to Naropa, but he refused to eat it.



With a snap of her fingers, the woman made the fish fly up into the air and said,

“Fish run after enjoyment. If you don’t eat and destroy the emotions that make you run after enjoyments, how can you find the Lama? I go now to kill my parents.”

She then disappeared, and Naropa understood that this vision was a message. A fish runs after food without paying attention, so it gets caught on a hook. So Naropa realized he must notice and pay attention to his thoughts of running after enjoyments and destroy those thoughts, so he can find his Lama.

And he understood that the next vision would involve someone killing their parents. It seemed very shocking, but Naropa understood that he was having visions that he must learn from, no matter how shocking they were.

And indeed, after he traveled some distance, he saw a man killing his parents. Naropa, knowing this was an illusion, asked the man if he had seen Tilopa. The man said, "If you help me, I'll help you." Naropa knew that would create terribly negative karma, so he refused.

The man said, "If you don't kill the grasping and desire, which cause birth in the six realms of samsara, how can you find the Lama? I go now to watch an unusual scene."

Naropa deeply understood the message that desire is the cause of karmas, which are good actions and bad actions, that cause a being to be born in one of the six realms of samsara: the hell-worlds, heaven-worlds, as a human, an animal, a hungry ghost, or a jealous asura. He also knew that he would next find an unusual scene to lead him to his Lama.



And soon he found a very unusual scene. There were people with one opened eye on their forehead, but their two eyes were closed. He asked one of the men, "Have you seen Tilopa?"

The man said, "I have not seen Tilopa.

If you truly wish to search for him, take care of the Lama in your heart. In the devoted student, devotion and confidence should grow within the mind and raise the sword of enlightened view. The meditation horse carries you to peace and a clear mind and reduces your grasping and desire. Experience the great bliss of meditation. The one eye is the single best taste of all."

Naropa didn't fully understand what the man meant, and he thought, "This man is very wise. Maybe I should ask him to be my teacher." But the man disappeared. He and the other people with the eye on their foreheads were just illusions.

He did understand, though, that the man was instructing him how important it is to develop devotion, confidence and meditation, and that they will help him reduce his desires. Perhaps the one eye on their foreheads was a symbol of divine vision, being able to see beyond this Earthly world, and that is the "single best taste of all."

All these visions taught Naropa that he must purify himself and reduce his desires. And still he had not found his Lama. He had traveled so far, and asked so many people – in his visions – whether they had seen his Lama. No one could tell him where his Lama was. He felt exhausted, and very discouraged. Perhaps he was not pure enough. Perhaps he had too many desires. He had failed in his mission to find his Lama. He wasn't good enough. He thought,

"I have not seen the Lama because of my negative tendencies which have not been purified. By following the instructions of the Dakinis, I gave up the University where the great teachings are. I left my good Buddhist friends. I ignored the advice of the kind people at the University. I have not found the Lama, even after all these horrible visions, all this mental suffering. This body is not finding what I am looking for. Therefore, why not search for the Lama by giving up this body."



He raised up his sword and thought he would kill himself right then and there.

But from the sky a voice spoke:

"By killing the Buddha, how can you find the Lama? Monk, perhaps I am the being you are looking for."

Naropa looked into the sky and wept. He was overcome with emotion. He folded his hands at his heart and said,

"Like a cloud in the sky, you are always changing!  
Although I searched, I could not find the precious one.  
Will you not look at me with compassion?  
Allow me to follow you!"

Tilopa replied,

"From the beginning I followed you like a shadow.  
But because of your impurities you did not see me.  
Now you have become a proper container for the precious instructions."

Naropa realized that Tilopa had been with him through his whole journey. He had given him all those visions to teach him and to purify him to get him ready to meet his Lama.

And now, Tilopa finally appeared to Naropa in his usual human form, and accepted Naropa as his student, his disciple. Then Tilopa gave him the teachings of the Dakinis that he had received from them.

They went to where Tilopa's other students were. The students said to Tilopa, "You are a great saint, beyond the human form, like a cloud in the sky. So who should one go to for teachings if he is trying to find peace?" They were concerned that they and future students would not be able to find Tilopa again.

Tilopa said, "Naropa went to me through twelve difficulties. He is like me. Those who search for peace in the future will go to Naropa."

Tilopa later gave empowerments to Naropa, to purify and eliminate his negative emotions - his desire, anger, hatred, jealousy. After giving the empowerments to Naropa's body, speech and mind, Tilopa held a flame to the edge of a cloth.



The flame quickly caught the cloth on fire. Within a moment the whole cloth had completely burned to ash in the flames.

Tilopa asked Naropa if he understood what that meant.

Naropa said, "In one moment, the empowerment burned away my impure emotions, like a flame burns a cloth."

In that way, Naropa developed non-attachment, which means that he had no more desires – no more feelings of liking and disliking, and being attached to things. So he felt completely content.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Naropa agree to marry the King's daughter? (he wanted to find his Lama, and he thought he would be told where Tilopa is if he married her)
2. Did Naropa know that the King and his daughter were just visions, not real people? (No, not until they disappeared)
3. What did Naropa do when the King's daughter left him? (got angry and put a spell on her)

4. What kind of horse did the people with one eye on their forehead teach him will lead to peace and a clear mind? (meditation horse)
5. How did Naropa feel after experiencing all those visions, and what did he want to do? (discouraged, exhausted, that he had failed his mission to find his Lama, wanted to kill himself)
6. When did Tilopa finally reveal himself to Naropa? (when Naropa wanted to kill himself with his sword)
7. What did Tilopa do to Naropa to purify him and get rid of his negative emotions? (gave empowerments)

#### DHARMA DISCUSSION – DESIRE:

*“If one attaches the mind to the enjoyment of form, sound and other things, one is like a bee stuck in honey. Be free of grasping, Naropa.” – Tilopa (GKM p. 86)*

*“The meaning of empowerment, like the spark of a fire, burns the cloth of afflicting emotion. I am content.” – Naropa (GKM p. 72)*

The visions Naropa had taught him in this story were:

Give up worldly life (cutting out the man’s insides)

Wash out impure thoughts (washing man’s insides)

Anger and hatred come from desire (hating the wife that left him)

Destroy desire and grasping (hunter killing desire and grasping)

Destroy the emotions that make you run after enjoyments (fish run after enjoyments – the bait on a hook)

Grasping and desire causes birth with suffering in hell-worlds, as hungry ghost, as animal, as human (killing and other bad actions are bad karmas, causing suffering).

Devotion to the Lama, confidence and meditation lead to wisdom (the divine eye)

When he finally was so discouraged that he wanted to kill himself, Tilopa taught him not to kill the Buddha – not to kill himself, the body in which the Buddha Nature is.

But Naropa could not get rid of his attachments until he got the empowerment from Tilopa, which purified his body, speech and mind.

What are “attachments”? The things you desire, the feeling of being attracted to things, the feeling of wanting what you like and avoiding what you dislike.

In his visions, learned a lot about desires, and that he must get rid of desires.

So does that mean we must get rid of ALL desires?

Are all desires bad, or are there some good desires? There are good desires.

Can you think of some good desires? To eat good food to keep our body healthy, to have friends, to be with our family, to help others, to be successful in school, to play a sport or music well, to make something beautiful.

What is the ultimate good desire in Buddhism? To be enlightened.

What is another good desire, a wonderful place to go after you die? To a Pure Land.

What are some other good desires in Buddhism? To develop compassion, lovingkindness, bodhicitta, purify our minds.

Sometimes in our daily life, our good desires can be mixed with a little selfishness.

For example, if we desire our team to win, the other team must lose.

Or, wishing to get the best grade in the class, then others must get worse grades than us.

How can you make those desires less selfish?

Desiring to perform your best for your team, regardless of who wins.

Desiring to get an "A" but wishing that all others do well in the class too.

What is "grasping"? Wanting to have something, or to hang onto something. Thinking about having it, how to get it, worrying about it, trying to keep it.

What is "contentment"? Freedom from desires.

How can we become more content? By reducing our likes and dislikes.

If we are always trying to go after what we like, then it leads to trouble, like the fish getting stuck on a hook when it is running after food.

Because we try so hard to get what we want, and to avoid what we don't want.

We're disappointed or angry when we don't get what we want, or when it becomes broken, stolen, or lost.

For example, if we have so many likes and dislikes of foods, then we are upset when we don't get the food we want. We can't always get what we want to eat, for example on a trip or at another person's house. Then we would be so upset because we have nothing that we can eat.

This is how desires lead to anger or hatred - when we don't get what we want, or when we lose something we like, we want to blame someone, so we shout at them or insult them, or think bad thoughts about them.

**ACTIVITY:** Practice meditation, compassion, and contemplation of desires:

Students sit in a circle, with one student in the middle of the circle. The other students begin a guided meditation:

"Feel your breath as it goes in and out of the nose. Feel the heart beating in the chest (put hand on heart to help feel it beating). Then think of how you care about yourself. You eat good food, you keep yourself healthy, you keep the body clean, and you keep your body warm enough or cool enough so your body is comfortable.

Now think about how you want yourself to be happy and peaceful.

Now let's think about (the student in the middle).

Let's have a good desire, a wish that s/he is happy and peaceful, that s/he has good friends, success in all that s/he does, a long and healthy life, and that in every way s/he is peaceful.... Now let's open our eyes."

Ask the student in the middle how s/he feels.

If s/he is not feeling happy and peaceful (perhaps bored!) then explain that maybe his/her desires (e.g. to do something else) are distracting him/her from feeling happy and peaceful. Then the next student takes a turn sitting in the middle.