

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 9 – Joy

Finally, Marpa had accepted Milarepa as his student. Milarepa felt the greatest happiness he had ever had, and shed tears of joy. Now it was time to make preparations to give him the teachings. Everyone at Marpa's house joyfully helped prepare the feast for Milarepa's initiation. That evening, Marpa ordained Milarepa to become a monk. Marpa said,

"I ordain you with the common vow of liberation."

And then he cut Milarepa's long hair off, and gave him a monk's robe to wear. Milarepa's name had been Good News, and Marpa had called him Great Magician. But now, Marpa announced,

"Even before you came here, my master Naropa revealed to me your name, Mila Vajra Banner-of-Victory, in a dream."

Mila was his family name, and his father's name was similar - Mila Banner of Wisdom. Marpa then gave Milarepa the basic practices of a Bodhisattva, one who is on the path of becoming a Buddha.



Next, Marpa took a cup which was made from a human skull bone, called a Kapala, and filled it with wine. He meditated to infuse the wine with spiritual power. Milarepa, Dakmema, and Ngokpa saw the wine bubbling with the light of the five colors – red, yellow, blue, white and green bubbles. Marpa offered it to his lama, Naropa, and to his yidam deity, and then drank some wine from it. He handed it to Milarepa, who drank all the wine remaining in the skull cup.

Marpa said, "This is a good sign. A mere taste of my wine of offering is better than receiving the complete initiation of any other lineage. Starting tomorrow, I will give you the Initiation of Transformation according to the secret path."



The next day, a beautiful elaborate mandala of Chakrasamvara was made from colored powders, especially for Milarepa's initiation.

Marpa chanted and gave Milarepa the initiation.

The lama pointed to the colorful mandala, and said,

"This is just a symbol of the mandala. The real mandala is up here."

He pointed to the sky.



Milarepa, Dakmema, Ngokpa, and all others who were assembled for the initiation looked up in the sky. They clearly saw the Yidam deity Chakrasamvara in the sky. At that moment, Marpa

and Chakrasamvara and the other deities spoke together, as if with one voice, to announce Milarepa's new formal name, Pal Zhepa Dorje, which means Glorious Laughing Vajra.

Marpa gave Milarepa the full teaching of the Tantra and explained to him in detail the way to practice according to the instructions. He placed his hands on Milarepa's head and said,

"My son, from the very first moment, I knew you were a student who would be capable of receiving the teaching. The night before you came here, I learned from a dream that you were destined to serve the teaching of Buddha. My wife, in a similar but even more remarkable dream, saw two women guardians of a stupa, indicating that the dakinis will protect the teaching of our lineage. In this way, my lama Naropa and the guardian deity sent you to me as a student. I went to meet you disguised as a laborer plowing the field. You drank all the beer that I had given you, and you finished plowing the whole field. This means that you will understand the entire teaching.

"To purify you from the darkness of evil that you had done, I burdened you with the increasingly terrible work of the towers. Every time I cruelly drove you away from the other students and overwhelmed you with grief, you had no bad thoughts against me. The teaching being transmitted to you will grow through your students, so rejoice, be happy!"

Marpa's kind and encouraging words gave joy to everyone in the room.

Later, he told Milarepa to meditate with perseverance. He provided Milarepa with food and supplies to survive while meditating alone, and directed him to a cave to meditate.



Milarepa went to the cave and filled a lamp with yak butter. He lit the lamp and placed it on his head so he could remain absolutely still while meditating.

He meditated all day and all night, until the butter in the lamp disappeared and the flame went out.

He meditated in the cave for 11 months. Then Marpa and his wife came to visit Milarepa in the cave, bringing him food for a feast to celebrate. The lama exclaimed,

“Well, my son, to meditate for 11 months without letting your cushion get cold is excellent. Open the entrance to your cave and come home for a rest so that you may talk with me, your old father, about your inner experience.”

Milarepa thought to himself, “It has been so peaceful here, but I must go out since it is an order given by the lama.”

Milarepa began to break down the wall he had made to close himself in the cave. But then he stopped for a moment, not daring to continue. Just then, Dakmema returned and asked,

“Are you coming, my son?”

Milarepa replied, “I dare not break down the wall.”

Dakmema said, “There is nothing wrong with coming out. Such an auspicious event as this meeting with the lama can only have a good result. It is the law of the secret path. Refusing would anger him and spoil the auspicious event, so break open the entrance and come out.”

Milarepa knew Dakmema would only tell the truth, so he tore down the wall and came out, and joined Dakmema and his lama.

Marpa said, “We two, father and son, will meditate together. Dakmema, prepare a feast.”



They made offerings and the lama said, “My son, what knowledge have you gotten from my special instructions? Let your mind relax and tell me what experiences and understanding you have achieved.”

Milarepa, with extreme faith and reverence for his lama, knelt down and put his palms together, his eyes blurring with tears, and

spoke prayers of respect and devotion for his dear lama. He expressed his deep gratitude to Marpa and Dakmema. Then he explained the deep understandings he got from his meditation. He said,

“I realize that the body is the blessed container for those fortunate beings who wish for freedom from the cycle of birth and death, but the body can lead sinners into the lower realms - rebirth as an animal, as a hungry ghost, or in the hell-worlds. So, in the body, beings can choose happiness forever in liberation, or the misery of going back and forth between good and evil in the worlds of samsara. I rely on your power of compassion as the guide, and I am hopefully trying to reach liberation from samsara, from which escape is very difficult.

“Having taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha (community of Buddhists) and carefully observed the Bodhisattva precepts, I understand that the source of all happiness is the lama. Therefore the first rule is to fulfill all his instructions and maintain a pure spiritual bond with him. One must develop Bodhicitta, working toward the liberation of all sentient beings.”

After he spoke of many insights that he gained from his meditation, Marpa said,

“My son, I had great hope and my hope has been fulfilled.” And he was filled with joy. Dakmema added, “This son of mine has the strength of mind for great achievement.”

After many religious talks, the lama and his wife returned to their house, and Milarepa went back to his cave, closing up the entrance so he could meditate without interruption.

One evening, Marpa was thinking about a making a visit to Naropa in India.



That same evening, Milarepa had a dream of a young girl who was as blue as the sky. She was beautiful with her ornaments, and her eyes were sparkling with light. She said to Milarepa,

“My son, you already have the Teaching of the Mahamudra meditation and instruction in the Six Yogas of Naropa. These lead to enlightenment by continuous meditation. But you don’t have the

special teaching of Transferring Consciousness to Dead Bodies, which leads to meditation in one moment of meditation. Ask for it!” And she disappeared.

Milarepa woke up and thought, "This young girl is like a dakini. Is it a warning from the gods? Is it a demon's trick? I don't know. Whatever it is, my Master will surely know. He knows everything, from how to become a Buddha to how to fix a broken jar. If this is a warning from the gods, I must ask for the teaching of Transferring Consciousness to Dead Bodies."

He broke down the wall of his cave entrance and went to his lama, who cried out, "Why have you come out of strict seclusion in the cave? This could slow down your progress. Why?"

Milarepa described the young girl and what she had said in his dream. He asked Marpa, "Is it a divine call or is it the sign of a problem? If it is a divine call, then I have come to ask for the teaching of Transferring Consciousness to Dead Bodies."

Marpa thought for a moment, and then responded, "It is certainly a warning from the dakinis. Before I left India, Master Naropa spoke about that teaching. Since I was about to leave, I may not have asked for the teaching."

Together, Marpa and Milarepa searched through the books for that teaching, but they didn't find any mention of it. Marpa said,

"Since there may be other teachings that I do not know, I will go to Naropa and ask for them."

Milarepa tried to discourage him from making the long and dangerous journey, mentioning that Marpa was getting quite old. But Marpa was determined to go, and sold all his gifts for gold so he could pack his wealth easily for the journey. He then left for India.

QUESTIONS:

1. When Milarepa was ordained as a monk, what happened to his hair and clothes? (his hair was cut off and he wore a monk's robe)
2. What is a Bodhisattva? (someone on the path to becoming a Buddha)
3. What kind of cup did Marpa pour the wine into? (a cup made from a human skull bone)
4. What happened to the wine after Marpa meditated on it? (it bubbled with colored bubbles)
5. Where did they see the deity Chakrasamvara? (in the sky)
6. How did Milarepa make himself sit still in meditation in the cave? (put a butter lamp on his head)
7. When Marpa and Dakmema came to visit Milarepa and invite him to a feast, did Milarepa immediately come out of his cave? (no)

8. Who did Milarepa see in a dream, that led Marpa to return to India to see Naropa? (a young girl with blue skin, dressed like a dakini)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – JOY

“Apply yourselves in auspicious Dharma with joyful heart.”

- Milarepa (100,000 songs p. 38)

“The yogi who . . . is unchanging and pure with whatever happens is always happy; The practitioner who follows whatever feelings arise letting attachment and aversion come as they please, is always miserable.”

- Milarepa (100,000 Songs, p. 485)

The story was filled with instances of joy. When Marpa accepted him as a student, Milarepa felt the greatest happiness he had ever had, and shed tears of joy.

Everyone at Marpa’s house joyfully helped prepare the feast for Milarepa’s initiation. They were happy for Milarepa, who had endured so much suffering.

When we feel joy, it’s usually because we got something that we wanted. But usually, what we want is a something that gives joy only for a little while. After that joy is gone, we feel the usual dissatisfactions – feeling irritable, tired, bored, hungry, angry, jealous, or not getting what we want. Joy is just a temporary feeling between all the dissatisfactions before and after the joy.

If we have a lot of likes and dislikes, it’s impossible to be able to get so many things that we want, and it’s impossible to avoid so many things that we don’t want. So then we will get frustrated often, whenever we can’t get what we want. And we’ll get upset often, whenever we get things we don’t want. That means we will be disappointed very often! That leads to a miserable life!

But if we don’t have so many likes and dislikes, we can feel content with the way things are, and then we don’t get disappointed often. So, we can enjoy whatever is happening. That leads to a more peaceful and happy life.

We should also remember that being a kind and loving person gives you feelings of joy that last longer than any joy that you can get from things.

ACTIVITY:

Toss a toy to another student while naming something that gives you joy. Each student who catches the toy must name something else that gives him or her joy.