

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 19 – Precious Human Life

Milarepa was becoming famous for taming the hungry ghosts and demons at Lapchi. People wanted to make offerings to him and listen to him teach Dharma. One lady, when she requested him to teach Dharma, even offered her young son to serve Milarepa when he grows older. The people wanted him to stay somewhere near their homes. The wealthy man named Shendormo offered to be his servant.

Milarepa stayed for a while in the village called Tsarma. But when he saw the everyday activities of the people, with their worries, fears, desires, quarrels, egos, pride and jealousy, he wanted to get away. So, he told the people in the village, “I am going to Lapchi Snow Mountain.”

With pleading voices, they replied, “Please, you can benefit us by staying here this winter and teaching us. After taming the demons, you can go as you please. Late next spring, we too will go there and serve you.” Shendormo and the teacher named Shakya Guna tried to persuade him to stay, saying, “When winter comes, it will be very difficult and tiring on the mountain in the snow.”

But however much they pleaded, Milarepa wouldn't listen. He said, “I, a son of the lineage of Naropa, have no fear of the howl of the snowstorms. Marpa's command to me was to give up distractions and worldly activities by staying in isolated places away from people. Especially for me, settling down in a village would be worse than death.”

It was clear he intended to leave. The people of Tsarma quickly offered food and supplies to Milarepa, and several of them promised to come and request him to teach them during the winter. Shendormo, Shakya Guna and four others brought Milarepa something to drink as he was leaving, and went with him for part of the journey. Milarepa took with him two containers of tsampa (roasted barley flour), a container of rice, meat and butter, and went on to the Great Cave of Taming Demons, where he stayed.



Meanwhile, while Shendormo , Shakya Guna and the others who had accompanied Milarepa were returning to the village, snow began falling. It soon became a blizzard. They had a hard time following the path to the village, because the snow was blowing in drifts up to their knees. They finally arrived at night.

Then it snowed for nine days. For six months after that, no one could travel in the direction Milarepa had gone

because of the deep snow. No matter how much the people of the village wanted to bring him food, the weather made it impossible. They thought surely that Milarepa must have starved to death. The little bit of food he had taken definitely was not enough for six months. So the people of the village conducted a funeral for him.

In the springtime, some people from the village went to find the dead body of Milarepa. They had to cut a path in the snow with large axes. After swinging axes and trudging in deep snow for so long, when they got near the place Milarepa had stayed, they had to sit down and rest.



While they were sitting there, they saw a big snow leopard climb up a big boulder and stretch its body. It looked at them for a long time and then went away.

One of the people said, "If the snow leopard ate Milarepa's body, there probably will be only pieces of his clothing or hair, and nothing else to be found."

They walked along with tears in their eyes. Sometimes they saw tigers or leopards. They wondered, were they real, or were they spirits or ghosts? Were they just seeing things that weren't real because of their grief that Milarepa had died?

When they arrived at the Great Cave of Taming Demons, they could hear singing. Who could possibly be singing way up on the mountain? Were they just hearing things that weren't real? It was Milarepa's voice! Impossible! Or, maybe, could it be that some hunters brought him food, or that he had found a dead animal and eaten it? But then how could he have survived the whole winter?

When they arrived at the cave, they saw Milarepa inside, who said to them, "The food is getting cold! Come quickly into the cave!"

They couldn't believe it. Was this real? They were so shocked and happy to see him that they ran up to him and began to weep, and tearfully clutched at his hands and feet with deep devotion and to convince themselves this was really happening.

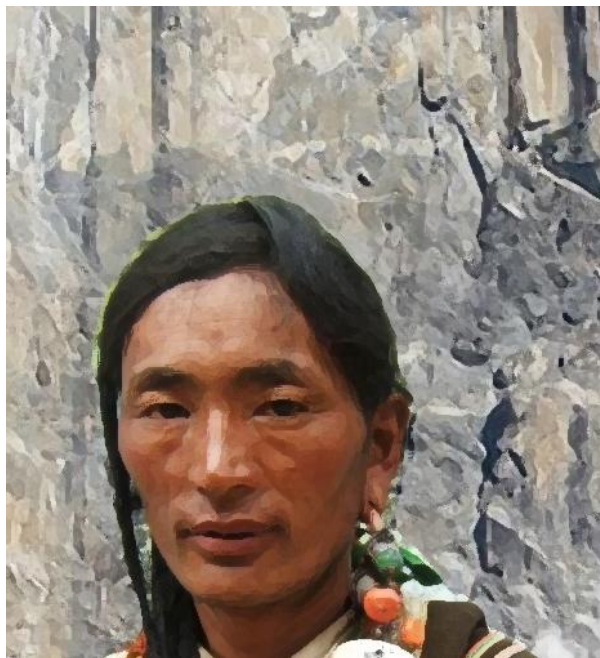
Milarepa said, "Now, don't cry, come on and eat!" There was a cooked dish of meat with rice.

The teacher Shakya Guna, still bewildered, said, "You cooked our food before we arrived! Did you see us coming by some psychic power?"

Milarepa replied, "Looking out from the top of a boulder, I saw you when you all were sitting and resting."

Shakya Guna said, "On that boulder we only saw a snow leopard. Where were you at that time?"

Milarepa replied, "The snow leopard was me. I am a yogi who has attained mastery over the life force and mind. I have overcome the four elements – earth, water, fire and air – so I can show miracles of transforming my body into anything I want. Since you are all good students, I showed you this miracle. But you should not speak of this to other people."



This was beyond comprehension.

To transform into an animal? How was that possible? But the fact that Milarepa was alive after being isolated without food the whole winter also seemed impossible.

Shendormo said, "You look even more radiant and healthy than last year. Since the snow closed off both entrances to the road, there was no way for any human to bring you anything. Was it a god or a ghost who served you? Or did you find a dead animal to eat? What happened?"

Milarepa explained, "Because my meditation was good, I didn't need to eat actual food. On special days, the dakinis each gave me a portion

of the ganachakra ceremony feast offering. Then sometimes I would gulp a mouthful of tsampa. And at the last part of the first month of the year, I had a vision in my meditation of all of you students surrounding me, bringing me lots of food and drink. Because of that I had no desire to eat for many days. What was it that you all did at that time?"

They figured out that it was the time they had conducted the funeral for him, and people had brought many offerings of food.

So those offerings of food satisfied Milarepa's hunger from far away! The men begged Milarepa to come with them, to stay close to the village.

"I'm very happy right here, and since my meditation is getting better, I will not go. But you all go ahead," he said.

If they returned without Milarepa, the villagers would think the men are lying about him being alive to prevent the villagers from blaming them for failing to help him survive the winter. One of the men said, "If you don't go, then the people of Nyanang will all say to us that we caused your death and will blame us." In particular, Jomo Urmo had sent a strong message for them to "Bring my dear teacher home!" The whole group urged him again and again to join them back to the village. They said, "If you will not come, then we will wait here even until death."

Milarepa then agreed to go. When they got close, Shendormo went ahead to spread the good news that their dear teacher had not died but was returning. All the people who heard the good news came out to greet Milarepa. Looking at his radiant face, they embraced him and wept, prostrated and walked around him in deep devotion.

When they arrived in Tsarma, its people – now students of Milarepa - offered a feast to celebrate their gratitude that he safely returned to them. They said, "Milarepa has come here unharmed by the great snowstorm, and all of us students have also survived. This coming together of master and students has made us extremely happy. Today we thank you for your kind gift of teaching the Dharma. We also ask you to teach us about what happened in your meditation this winter." So Milarepa sang a song about his meditation.

Shendormo said, "Although meeting the precious Milarepa is like meeting the Buddhas, there are people who don't even serve you, follow you, or practice the Dharma, let alone have devotion to you. They are more stupid than animals!"



Milarepa replied, "If someone doesn't have pure devotion toward me, that is fine. But if someone does not practice Dharma when they have gotten a precious human life at a time when the Buddha's teachings are available, that is extremely foolish."

He sang a song explaining further, which included these words:

“When the Dharma has extensively spread,
To carelessly engage in nonvirtue [bad behavior] is extremely foolish.
With this body and its freedoms and resources that are so hard to get,
To waste this human life is extremely foolish.”

The people of Tsarma pleaded with him, “Please accept us. Although we are not as clever or smart as you, we will try to avoid falling into such foolish things. Please stay here as a resident lama teaching the Dharma for those of us who are living, and performing the Pure Land rituals for those who have passed away. Please continually stay here with us.”

Milarepa replied, “I must meditate at Lapchi Snow Mountain as my guru instructed. I will only stay here a little while. Anyway, I don’t know anything about how to please you, who are my supporters. Also, if I stay, you would only eventually think of me with contempt [negative thoughts].”

He sang,

“By staying continuously in a single place, when you’re with people a short time, you’ll get sick of them.

If you get too familiar, you’ll naturally have contempt for them.

If you stay for long, by not meeting expectations there will be much offense.”

They said in reply, “We students would not get sick of listening to you, but you would get sick of us! Although we begged you to stay, there’s no way you will listen. Please do think of us and return quickly again and again.”

They made many offerings to him, but he didn’t accept them. The students gathered there were all amazed that he didn’t want their gifts. He had no desires for nice things, as he was completely detached from worldly life. With great delight, they had indestructible faith in Milarepa.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Milarepa want to get away from the village and go to Lapchi Snow Mountain? (he saw the people had worry, fear, jealousy, desires, pride, ego, and his guru Marpa had instructed him to go to Lapchi, and stay alone, away from people)
2. Why couldn’t the villagers bring food to Milarepa while he was at the cave on the mountain? (a huge snowstorm blocked the way)
3. What did the villagers think happened to Milarepa? (that he died from starvation)
4. What animal did Milarepa transform his body into? (a snow leopard)

5. Why didn't Milarepa need to eat food? (because his meditation was good, and the villagers offered food at his funeral that made him have no need to eat)
6. What is the precious thing that we all have that is extremely foolish to waste by misbehaving and not practicing Dharma? (human life or human body)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – PRECIOUS HUMAN LIFE:

“. . . if someone does not practice Dharma when they have gotten a precious human life at a time when the Buddha's teachings have spread, that is extremely foolish.”

*“When the genuine Dharma has extensively spread,
To carelessly do non-virtuous actions is extremely foolish.
With this body and its freedoms and resources so hard to get,
To waste this human life is extremely foolish.”*

- (100,000 Songs of Milarepa pp. 38-39)

Do you have a precious human life?

What does it mean to have a precious human life?

Think about how lucky we all are.

We weren't born as an animal, a jealous spirit (asura), a hungry ghost, or someone suffering terribly in a hell world.

Even animals suffer a lot - most animals are often hungry or afraid of being attacked and are always searching for food, and they suffer injuries and diseases alone in the wild.

Even many dogs and cats get neglected by their owners, or sit at home, bored, while their owner works.

We are lucky that we were born healthy. We can move, talk, and learn without a problem.

We are lucky that we are living in a place that is safe, not in a war zone or a place with violence or serious diseases.

We are lucky that the Buddha's teachings are easily available to us.

And you are lucky that your parents make the Dharma available to you.

With all that luck, what if you just forget about the Dharma, and hang around with kids who misbehave - who are undisciplined, disrespectful, selfish, show off, or who lie or hurt others?

Of course, we want to fit in with kids at school and have friends.

Some kids who are popular like to make others laugh at their wild or daring behavior - making fun of someone, talking behind others' backs, stealing, or using bad words.

Some like to act like a diva, self-centered, or a show-off. Have you seen kids like this at school? It might seem fun to hang around these kinds of kids who make us laugh.

But then we are likely to join in that kind of behavior, and forget about Dharma.
What kind of habits does that lead us into?
So we should be aware of how we choose our friends.

If we forget about Dharma in this precious life, then we will have wasted our life and in our next life we may not be so lucky.
What would Milarepa say about that? Yes - that it's extremely foolish!

ACTIVITY:

Make a poster – Cut out and paste one of the snow leopards (next page) onto poster paper or light-colored paper, and then write one of these quotations of Milarepa neatly in pencil (so mistakes can be erased), then go over it in marker:

“If someone does not practice Dharma when they have gotten a precious human life at a time when the Buddha’s teachings have spread, that is extremely foolish.” - Milarepa

*“When the genuine Dharma has extensively spread,
To carelessly do non-virtuous actions is extremely foolish.
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